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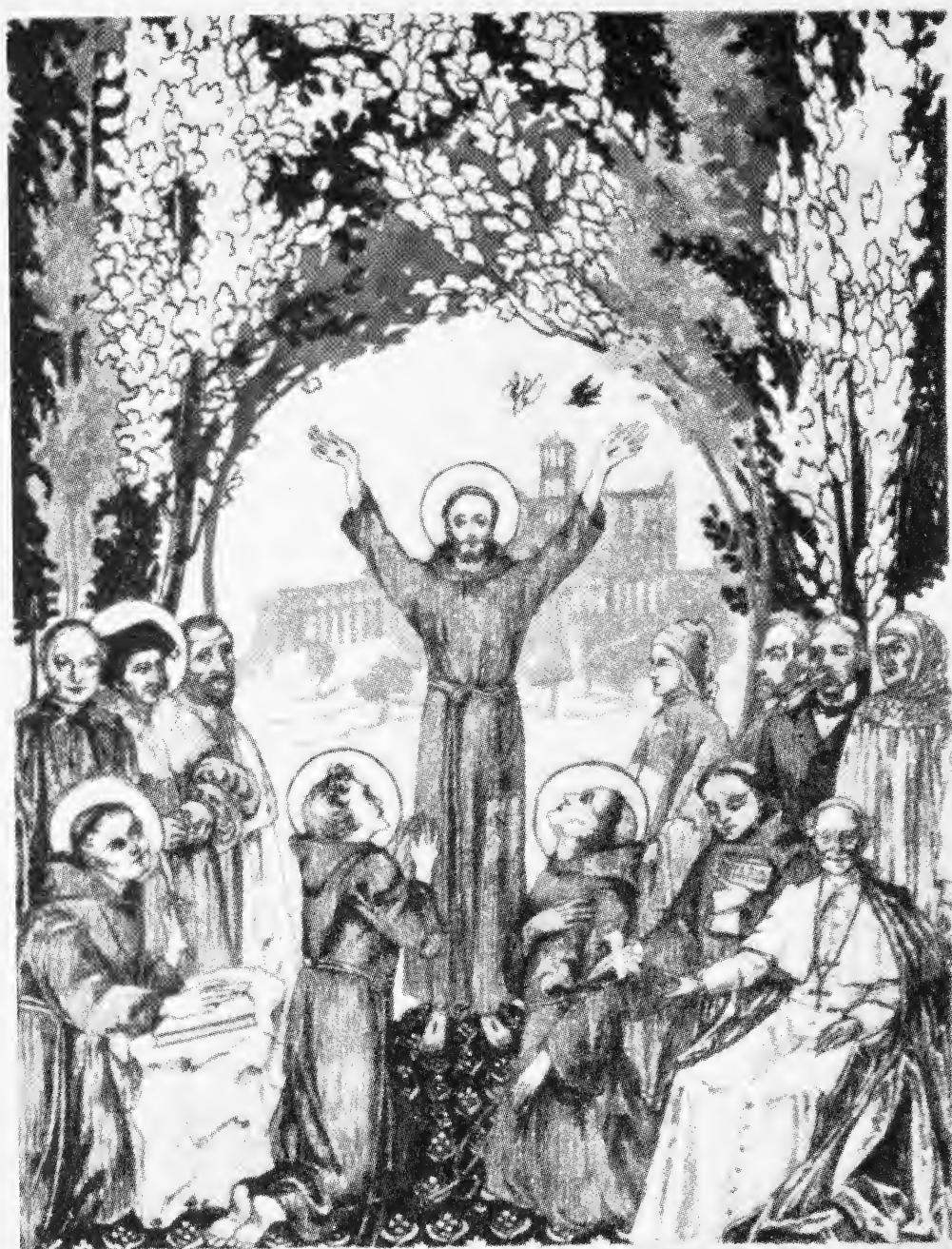




## FRANCISCAN POETS

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Our Blessed father Saint Francis &  
Some of his Sons or Sons:  
Cardinal Vaughan, St Thomas More, Michelangelo, Dante, Francis Thompson,  
Geoffrey Chaucer, Petrarch, St Bonaventura, Jacopone, St Anthony, Celano, Leo XIII



Anthony M. Mason, S.J.  
(Anthony Francis Mason)  
1932

# FRANCISCAN POETS

BY

BENJAMIN FRANCIS MUSSER

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*Frontispiece by the Author*

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## *Author's Note*

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This book is dedicated to my fellow Academy members of the Catholic Poetry Society of America, as well as to all poets of the Seraphic Family, and in particular to my friend Ven. Frater Augustine, O.F.M., Cleric.





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## FRANCISCAN POETS





## I.

### *"The Chaucer of Scotland"*

THE unfulfillment of what had seemed a divine vocation is always one of the baffling mysteries of grace. While we must fall back on Scriptural statement and say that many are called but few are chosen, the fact is thereby accepted but the explanation remains hidden with Christ. We know that the great Scots poet William Dunbar had in him the making of a model Franciscan, gentleness, tenderness, intense loyalty to the Faith, love of poverty, a keen sense of humor, a devout simplicity of character. He retained these qualities through life, though it must be admitted his humor latterly took the form, often, of burlesque and satire, and if he remained a mendicant it was only because his plea for a remunerative benefice was unheeded. Yet even in the midst of court life he was an ascetic—an ascetic troubadour, to word a paradox only a Franciscan can comprehend. So, while it must remain a mystery how Dunbar, erst-

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while novice and later a secular priest but always a friar at heart, yet could turn or be turned from what he had believed to be his Religious vocation, that he did belong even for but a time to the family of St. Francis and always to its spirit, entitles him to be listed among history's Franciscan poets.

If little is known, to the general public, of the life of William Dunbar, to the casual poetry reader he is hardly more than a name, for he was and is essentially a poet's poet. Though he was a borrower, adapting phraseology and poem constructions from Chaucer, Villon, Dante and perhaps Piers Plowman—a strangely assorted quartet, to be sure—his own inventions, and particularly his marvelous use of rhyme, give him a place apart in the history of prosody. Nor was his individuality merely a craving to be different. He had legitimate poetic purpose in his inventions; his famous "Ballat of Our Lady," for example, of which I shall presently quote a part,<sup>1</sup> employed a form of internal- and end-rhymed stanzaic pattern which adapted itself perfectly to a rhythm expressive of the poet's devotional mood. As Lascelles Abercrombie says of this poem, "The greatest feat of rhyming in our [British] literature is Dunbar's 'Ballat of Our Lady': and such a reiterated chime as this, carried on through seven stanzas, does certainly infect our minds with the poet's rapt intensity of adoration."<sup>2</sup>

## "THE CHAUCER OF SCOTLAND"

Here are the first twelve lines in their original vocabulary and spelling:

Hale, sterne superne! Hale in eterne,  
In Godis sicht to schyne!  
Lucerne in derne, for to discerne  
Be glory and grace devyne;  
Hodiern, modern, sempitern,  
Angelicall regyne,  
Our tern inferne for to disperne  
Helpe rialest rosyne.  
*Ave Maria gratia plena!*  
Haile, fresche flour femynyne;  
Yerne ws guberne, wirgin matern,  
Of reuth baith rute and ryne.

Born probably in East Lothian, about 1460, this true son of Scotland was graduated B.A. at St. Andrew's University in 1479. Educated for the Church, though apparently not priested before early middle age, as he did not celebrate his first Mass until 1504, he did however shortly after his collegiate graduation enter the novitiate of the Friars Minor. With a license to preach, ready "all men to begyle," as he says of himself, he went forth, this wandering friar, and made good cheer "in every lusty town and place" in England "from Berwick to Kallice," and also crossed "the ferry" at Dover and instructed the people of Picardy.

Those must have been his happiest years. But the mystery remains: for apparently youthful

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fervor cooled when worldly preferment offered itself, and we hear no more of him among the sons of St. Francis. Always he is referred to, during this period, simply as novice, never as professed, never as cleric.

By 1490 he had returned to Scotland and entered the service of James IV as court poet and subsequently as the Crown's ambassador to Paris and elsewhere. For adequate carrying out of these missions he received, as is evident from the court records, a life pension, but a piteously small one even for those times. In 1503 he celebrated James's marriage to Margaret of England with his well-known poem "The Thrissil and the Rois" (The Thistle and the Rose), symbolizing the amity between the two kingdoms. Dunbar received money gifts from the King on this and other occasions, such as the celebration of the poet-priest's first Mass, but though he often petitioned for a benefice, limiting his wishes, as he said, to a small country kirk covered with heather, this world's fortune never dropped into his lap. His song to the King, "On the Warld's Instabilitie," did not loosen the Scottish purse-strings; his "Meditation in Winter" and his petition of the "gray horse," or that is to say "Auld Dunbar" himself, failed to bring him the country benefice; and so he remained to the end, the greatest Scots poet of his time, some say of all time, existing always on starvation pension. It was rather a ghastly joke for one who had quit the

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brothers of holy poverty at sight of a royal mirage, to find himself always as poor as those who were faithful to poverty's vow. And so this attribute of the friars he retained, whether willingly or the reverse.

But if his ill fortune at times turned his humor to an inimical and withering satire, even, rarely, to what we now call the colloquial coarseness of his century, it also did him a good turn. Sorrow gave his naturally mystical leaning a dignity and growth which have caused him to be allied with Dante. If, therefore, he is usually called the "Chaucer of Scotland," and put himself in print as deeply indebted to the Englishman,<sup>3</sup> there have been critics who have hailed him as Scotland's Dante.

Here is the estimate of our poet by dear Edwin Markham, dean of American poets<sup>4</sup>: "In the long interregnum of dulness in English poetry which followed the passing of Chaucer, the Scottish poets were the truest followers of 'the father of English poetry.' Lack of self-criticism, resulting in aridity, marred the verse of the English poets, who seemed not to comprehend the genius of their avowed master Chaucer. Of the 'moral Gower' whom Chaucer commended, Lowell said with pardonable hyperbole that he had 'positively raised tediousness to the precision of science.' Of John Lydgate, Thomas Occleve and Stephen Hawes, all of whom lived mainly in the fifteenth century, the gems of poetry in their ashheaps of prosing are so rare as to

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make long-windedness.<sup>5</sup> Chaucer's sympathetic and quizzical grasp of human character was lost to these men, as was the secret of his music and his colorful words. In Scotland, however, at least three poets of distinction bridged the gap of the fifteenth century: the royal James I, author of the 'King's Quhair'; Robert Henryson, who added a conclusion of great tragic force to Chaucer's 'Troilus and Cressida'; William Dunbar, in some things the greatest poet of his land. Burns is Dunbar's superior in pure singing, but the earlier poet had the greater sweep of imagination and the greater variety of mood and expression. Dunbar became courtier and diplomat after being an itinerant 'begging friar.' He saw much of the world in its many masks and ranks; but he strives too often for 'aureateness,' fine language used merely for its decorative quality.<sup>6</sup> Again, in his work, the old medieval liking for allegory still muffles his mouth. His burlesques, on the other hand, have been compared with those of Aristophanes. George Gilfillan refers to Dunbar as 'the Dante of Scotland,' and he questions whether any English poet has surpassed 'The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins' in its peculiarly Dantesque qualities of severe and purged grandeur, of deep sincerity, and in that air of moral disappointment and sorrow approaching despair, which distinguished the sad-hearted lover of Beatrice. Perhaps we can sum up Dunbar's poetry by calling it a medley in which are gathered tenderness and vin-

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dictiveness, blistering satire and exuberant fancy."

Here are two excerpts from his superb poem above mentioned, the "Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis," as accurately quoted by Ernest Rhys.<sup>7</sup>

Of Februar the fyftene nycht,  
Full lang befoir the dayis lycht,  
I lay in till a trance;  
And than I saw baith Hevin and Hell:  
Me thocht, amangis the feyndis fell,  
Mahoun gart cry ane Dance  
Off Schrewis that were nevir schrevin,  
Aganis the fesit of Fasternis evin  
To make thair observance;  
He bad gallandis ga graith a gyiss  
And kast up garmountis in the Skyiss  
As varlotis dois in France.

\* \* \* \*

Lat se, quoth he, now quha begynnis,  
With that the fowll Sevin Deidly synnis  
Begowth to leip at anis.  
And first of all in Dance was Pryd,  
With hair wyld bak, and bonet on syd,  
Lyk to mak vaistie wanis;  
And round abowt him, as a quheill,  
Hang all in rumpillis to heill  
His kethat for the nanis:  
Mony prowde trumpowr with him trippit  
Throw skalkand fyre, ay as thay skippit  
Thay gyrnd with hyddous granis.

While those of us not of Scots blood are necessarily moving somewhat as through a maze when trying to read Dunbar, who because of his use of



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the Scottish diminutive and choice of rhyme-endings in addition to his geographical dialect and his fifteenth-century vocabulary, is more difficult even than Chaucer—and is without the recent advantage (?) given to Geoffrey of a “translation” into modern terminology—the reader nevertheless comes soon to an intuitive interpretation of the poet’s imagery and language, and presently finds him neither too crabbed nor too precious for a genuine appreciation.

To give you respite from arduous deciphering, here is another and typical poem of Dunbar’s, the modernized spelling edited by Gordon Crosse.<sup>8</sup>

### UNTO US A SON IS BORN

*Rorate coeli desuper!*  
Heavens distil your balmy showers,  
For now is risen the bright Daystar,  
From the rose Mary, flower of flowers:  
The clear Sun, whome no cloud devours,  
Surmounting Phoebus in the east,  
Is comen of His heavenly towers  
*Et nobis Puer natus est.*

Sinners be glad, and penance do,  
And thank your Maker heartfully;  
For He that ye might not come to,  
To you is comen full humbly,  
Your soules with His blood to buy,  
And loose you of the fiend’s arrest,  
And only of His own mercy;  
*Pro nobis Puer natus est.*

## "THE CHAUCER OF SCOTLAND"

Celestial fowles in the air  
Sing with your notes upon height;  
In firthes and in forests fair  
Be mirthful now at all your might,  
For passed is your dully night,  
Aurora hath the cloudes pierced,  
The sun is risen with gladsome light,  
*Et nobis Puer natus est.*

Sing heaven imperial, most of height,  
Regions of air make harmony,  
All fish in flood and food of flight  
Be mirthful and make melody:  
All *Gloria in excelsis* cry,  
Heaven, earth, sea, man, bird, and beast;  
He that is crowned above the sky  
*Pro nobis Puer natus est.*

Among his other finest poems are the "Golden Targe," an allegory illustrating the victory of love over reason, a poem admired by Francis Palgrave who called it "the fine flower of expiring mediævalism"; "Lament for the Makers,"<sup>9</sup> and "The Merle and the Nightingale," a long poem quoted in modern dress in George Carver's admirable textbook.<sup>10</sup>

In 1511 the priest-poet is mentioned among Queen Margaret's train on one of her journeys; but nothing is heard of him after 1513, the year of the battle of Flodden. Dr. David Laing, who a century ago published Dunbar's complete works in a now almost inaccessible edition,<sup>11</sup> was of opinion Scotland's great poet fell at that fight, presumably, it

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is inferred, while serving as chaplain, but most writers believe him to have survived until 1520, the year usually assigned as that of his demise.

It seems not a little strange that that poet who has been hailed both as the Dante and Chaucer of Scotland, by Markham as "in some things the greatest poet of his land," by Abercrombie as author of "the greatest feat of rhyming in our literature," by Sir Walter Scott as "a poet unequalled by any that Scotland has ever produced," and who is revered by countless poets everywhere however unfamiliar he may be to the prosaic, nonetheless emerges only for a time from the mists of anonymity, leaves no exact recorder of his dates of birth and ordination and death, and, most mysterious of all, must be remembered in Franciscan annals only as a novice though saturated during that period with the Franciscan spirit and always retentive of the Poverello's innocence, combined gayety and asceticism, mysticism and, at least outwardly, as a disciple of Lady Poverty.

<sup>1</sup> The complete poem, modernized in spelling, is given in Dr. Thomas Walsh's compilation, *The Catholic Anthology*, pp. 130, 131 (N. Y.: Macmillan Co., 1927).

<sup>2</sup> Lancelles Abercrombie: *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 144 (N. Y.: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1926).

<sup>3</sup> His brief poem to Chaucer, commencing "O reverend Chaucer! rose of rhetoris all," can be found in *The Le Gallienne Book of English Verse*, p. 8 (N. Y.: Boni & Liveright, 1922).

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Poetry*, vol. i, pp. 900, 901 (N. Y.: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1927).

<sup>5</sup> This is a cruelly severe judgment, but we must let its refutation pass for the moment as not germane to our subject.

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<sup>6</sup> As this charge can even today be equally laid to ninety-nine out of every hundred poets, its application to Dunbar is not particularly damning.

<sup>7</sup> *Lyric Poetry*, by Ernest Rhys, pp. 99, 100 (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1913).

<sup>8</sup> *Every Man's Book of Sacred Verse* (London & Oxford: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1923).

<sup>9</sup> The complete poem, with edited spelling, can be found in Shane Leslie's compilation, *An Anthology of Catholic Poets*, pp. 102-4 (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1925).

<sup>10</sup> *The Catholic Tradition in English Literature*, ed. by George Carver, pp. 34 sqq. (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co. [Doubleday, Doran], 1926).

<sup>11</sup> Laing: *Works of Dunbar*, with biography and notes (Edinburgh, 1834; supplement added 1876).

## II.

### "Poet of Celestial Vision"

THERE was something peculiarly appropriate in the pilgriming of Francis Thompson to Pantasaph in 1892, and again five years later, where he prepared for publication the final sheets of his first book, *Poems*, and where he created most of the content of his third book, *New Poems*. There was more than appropriateness in those pilgrimages and that life at the Capuchin Monastery at Pantasaph, near Holywell, North Wales; there was more, even, than the inspiration of Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, "discoverers" of the sorry genius, if anyone can ever be said to be a poet's discoverer. There was the finger of God, pointing the way to a soul designed to know itself as last among "the bearded counsellors of God," as Thompson has called his Capuchins. "Poetry clung about the cowls of his Order," elsewhere he wrote, in dealing with the works of our holy founder and of Thomas of Celano. Certainly the Franciscan family, more

## "POET OF CELESTIAL VISION"

perhaps than any other in the Church, has been imbued with that higher poetry of the soul in all its work and expression; in its Capuchin branch there was the peace and solace, there was the perfect setting, there was the spiritual affinity, and there were the right companions, for the flowering and growth of him whom Wilfrid Meynell called the "Poet of Celestial Vision."

Like the greater Francis, his namesake Francis Thompson had had sacred commerce *cum Domina Paupertate*; like him of Assisian hills, the poet of London streets had been laughed at, pushed aside, misunderstood; like him, the soaring spirit could not be downed by circumstance. Both had the inward eye, the outer humility; both found delight in and gave voice to the inarticulate little things of creation. Both had the *sancta simplicitas* of the true poet and real child. Each felt an unearthly tenderness, the purest of pure affection, for a woman, the elder Francis for the blessed lady of San Damiano, though he curiously mixed Clare repeatedly with that deeper call on his devotion, Lady Poverty, the younger Francis for that contemplative of letters, Alice Meynell, to whom he wrote the poems of which Coventry Patmore said that Laura would have been proud. The saint of Umbria sang a "Canticle of the Sun," the mystic of Lancashire and Sussex poured out the "Ode to the Setting Sun" (1889) as first conclusive sign of the splendor of his powers. But also, like the greater Francis, he,

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being a mystic, draws away from the Pantheist and the Pagan to rest in Christ. "To be the poet of the return to Nature," he says in a prose study of Pico della Mirandola, "is somewhat; but I would be the poet of the return to God."

Even so, O Cross! thine is the victory:  
Thy roots are fast within our fairest fields—

he wrote in his *After Strain* of the "Ode to the Setting Sun," speaking, as Theodore Maynard points out, "the language of the heart, or mysticism, in words which might have been uttered by St. John of the Cross."<sup>1</sup> Everard Meynell calls attention to the fact that, as the ode to the sun ends with the Cross, so all Thompson's songs of nature are, quoting the poet,

Sweet with wild things that pass,  
That pass away,—

passed away, says Mr. Meynell, "that they might be garnered in heaven. The chace of 'The Hound of Heaven' ends in a divine embrace; like that ending is the ending of all his verse."<sup>2</sup>

Half anticipated by his mother for the priesthood, his career switched in favor of his father's medical profession from which he fled to London streets, rescued by a chance manuscript or two sent



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to a magazine, saved from a grinding poverty and from opium and for a time from incipient disease to produce imperishable poetry and penetrating prose, then almost silent for a decade while he found his soul, then the shadow of the valley, then peace: such in bare outline is the story of Francis Joseph Thompson.

The boy must have been an anxiety to his practical father, Charles, a provincial doctor of Lancashire, first of Preston, where his second son Francis was born, 18 December, 1859, then of Ashton-under-Lyne, where they remained until Francis's flight to London (with luggage consisting chiefly of his Blake and Aeschylus). "I was in every sense an unsatisfactory son," the poet declared with sad humility in his later life. The father's own comment, when he found his son welcomed as a poet, was: "If the lad had but told me!"

The seven years at Ushaw, alma mater of Lingard and of Wiseman, the college whence his pious mother hoped to see him step forth a priest, were fruitful—who can say how very fruitful?—in his poetic as in his spiritual life; but they did not realize his mother's special dream for him any more than her own maiden effort to enter the Religious Life had been successful for Mary Turner Morton. (She was a postulant at the Convent of the Holy Child, St. Leonards-on-Sea. Both Francis's mother and father had become converts to the Faith, before

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they met; his sister Mary became a nun at Manchester, Mother Austin.) Francis's mother died the day after her son reached legal manhood.

His six years at Owens College, where in deference to his father's wishes the boy studied or attempted to study the medicine he hated—and feared—were productive chiefly of the spirit of evasion rather than rebellion, and of intensive reading—but not of medical books on the poetry shelves of Manchester's public library, and of much writing—but not of college theses. Yes, a trial and anxiety, perhaps as great a worry as are all poet sons to all prosaic but ambitious parents.

The laudanum, to which he became addicted following an illness during his early courses at Owens, was small surcease for the unhappy youth. For years the drug was his master, as the worldly rejoice in knowing only too well; but the world forgets that the life opium conserved in him triumphed over the death opium dealt out to him: that it staved off tuberculosis and thus gave him his great creative years; that the genius of De Quincey, who had also spent much time in Manchester's library, and the genius of Coleridge, another victim, was bequeathed to our poet; that despite its usually deadening effects to morals and finer sensibilities, Francis Thompson it left unmarred: save that he was to suffer almost past belief and so was ever lost to him the happy heart and gaiety of a troubadour, he retained, even in London gutters and

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in the most loathsome of circumstances, a singular purity of heart and inherent gentleness of thought and speech. He was inalienably a Catholic of the household of the Saints; always a lamentable want of earthly ballast was infinitely more than compensated in loftiness of ascetic soul, in the will to be conquered only by Divine Love. The weaknesses and lapses of the pursued, the steadfastness of the Pursuer, this old story of God and the soul, he has immortalized with never-to-be-surpassed intensity in his, perhaps, greatest ode, “The Hound of Heaven,” written in 1891.<sup>3</sup>

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated,

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

So on and on, the soul knocking vainly for shelter  
at the door of earthly love,—

But if one little casement parted wide,

The gust of His approach would clash it to.

The comradeship of nature likewise failed him—

But not by that, by that, was eased by human smart.  
In vain my tears were wet on Heaven’s gray cheek.

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Until at long last—

Now of that long pursuit  
Comes on at hand the bruit;  
That Voice is round me like a bursting sea.

And the voice—

All which I took from thee, I did but take  
Not for thy harms,  
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.  
All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies at lost, I have stored for thee at home:  
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!

Of this magnificent poem, much too long and well known for reprint here in its entirety, Thompson's inspiring critic and friend J. L. Garvin said, " 'The Hound of Heaven' seems to us the most wonderful lyric in our language." Elsewhere, after acclaiming Shakespeare's sonnets as "the greatest soliloquy in literature," Mr. Garvin added, " 'The Hound of Heaven' and 'Sister Songs' together are the second greatest and there is no third." <sup>4</sup> Coventry Patmore called the "Hound" "one of the very great odes of which the language can boast"; Burne-Jones said that "Since Gabriel's [Rossetti's] 'Blessed Damsel' no mystical words have so touched me."

The three years of London agony, in which he served menially as a caller of cabs, as a "collector" in the book trade, as an errand boy to a bootmaker,

## "POET OF CELESTIAL VISION"

as a match-seller, or more often than not in no capacity because none would employ a man in rags; the years of agony, when he perforce slept in filthy lodging-houses, "the places infamous to tell," where he would lie watching beetles crawling on the ceiling and keep his soul though his ears were assailed by talk that cried to heaven from a "gangrenous multitude blackening ever into lower mortifications of humanity," as he said in later years—that was the exchange he made for the nights when he had no pennies and so no indoor bed, when

Forlorn, and faint, and stark  
I had endured through watches of the dark  
The abashless inquisition of each star,  
Yea, was the outcast mark  
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny—

the years when in his drug at least lay the cessation of pain, those years lasted not forever; and in their going, and in his rescue by Wilfrid Meynell, to whose magazine *Merry England* he had by chance sent some Mss., and in pouring forth thereafter of that limpid stream of poetry which is without equal in our time for its heaven-singing music, he passed from the purgative to the illuminative way of the mystic. "The renunciation of opium," as Everard Meynell has noted, "not its indulgence, opened the doors of his intellect. Opium killed the poet in Coleridge; the opium habit was stifled at the birth of the poet in Thompson. His images came

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toppling about his thoughts overflowing during the pains of abstinence." <sup>5</sup>

A doctor's care and some months as a boarder at the Premonstratensian monastery at Storrington, Sussex, gave him a new hold on life and at Storrington, at Palace Court in London, or at the Capuchin haven in Wales, during the next seven years the poet poured out his soul in poems, essays, critical reviews, letters, marginalia. In those years, from 1889 to 1896, he wrote the content of his three volumes of verse, *Poems*, *Sister Songs* and *New Poems*. Nor should we overlook his prose, his *Life and Labours of St. John Baptist de la Salle*, the remarkable *Health and Holiness: A Study of the Relation between Brother Ass—the Body, and his Rider—the Soul*, and the much later *Life of St. Ignatius Loyola*, which appeared serially in *The Athenæum* the year of the poet's death; and especially shall we always remember and treasure his greatest and posthumous prose work, the *Essay on Shelley*.

He wrote but little poetry during the last ten years of his life (Francis died in the hospital of the Sisters of St. John and St. Elizabeth, London, 13 November, 1907); but even that little is now hoarded by a world which, as is the world's way with most great poets, would have none of him during his lifetime. Not that the neglect distressed him: he was as indifferent to the world's estimate of the worth of his writings as was St. Francis de

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Sales; what he did value was the good word of discriminating critics, of authentic poets, and that he received without stint.<sup>6</sup> G. K. Chesterton hailed him as "a great poet," H. D. Traill as "a poet of the first order," George Meredith as "a true poet, one of a small band"; Arnold Bennett as long ago as 1895 wrote, "My belief is that Francis Thompson has a richer natural genius, a finer poetical equipment, than any poet save Shakespeare." And so, too, William Archer: "It is no minor Caroline simpers that he recalls, but the Jacobean Shakespeare." After his death the world, as it sometimes does, wakened to its loss. Within three years the separate edition of *The Hound of Heaven* had sold fifty thousand copies, and later had a circulation in this form and in anthologies beyond calculation. And when appeared that spectacular, that glorious posthumous essay on Shelley, the whole world applauded—too late, of course, for Francis to hear . . . But by that time he was hearing sweeter music than the paeans of man to man. The Right Hon. George Wyndham hailed the essay, in the preface of its first reissue in separate form following its appearance in the *Dublin Review* of July, 1908, as "the most important contribution to pure letters written during the last twenty years."

The deepest spiritual peace of his life was found in his long visits to Pantasaph, where he lived first in Bishop's House, at the monastery gates, subsequently at the post-office and finally in a cottage on

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the hill behind the monastery. Thither would go his friends, the Meynells, to see him, only to hear he was wandering in the wood or lost in contemplation in chapel. Thither, too, went his elderly friend Coventry Patmore, like himself a contributor to *Franciscan Annals* during the editorship of Father Anselm, O.M.Cap. (who later was made Archbishop of Simla). And, like Patmore, Francis Thompson was there enrolled formally as a Tertiary in the Franciscan family to which he had always belonged in spirit. He was admitted to the Third Order, Capuchin branch, in the beautiful monastery church, the votive gift of the Earl and Countess of Denbigh and Desmond, for use of the friars as a thanksgiving for conversion to the Church at the hands of Bishop James Gillis of Scotland.

The poetry of Francis Thompson is never easy reading, except, possibly, such exquisitely tender things as "Ex Ore Infantium," commencing

Little Jesus, wast Thou shy  
Once, and just so small as I?  
And what did it feel like to be  
Out of Heaven, and just like me?—

and even this, for a real understanding, requires a *simpatica* few can muster in this sophisticated era; for the poetry of what Lionel Johnson called "divine audacity" asks the reader to be a Christian, a Franciscan, a poet, a child. "Is the meaning of



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Francis Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven' to be grasped," asks Chauncey Brewster Tinker, "by one who rejects the notion of a loving personality behind the universe?"<sup>7</sup>

Thompson's designed use of words strange to our ears is another stumbling block and one which, during his lifetime, brought against him the heaviest artillery of critics. Yet we see now how inalienably right he was in his usage for his particular type of poetry and in each special instance. I may be permitted here to quote from my book *The Passion Called Poetry*: "Francis Thompson was a past master in the gentle art of juggling with obscurities: he enriched the language with one hundred and thirty new locutions and luminous terms which it is hard to see how even Shakespeare managed to do without."<sup>8</sup> Some of his many word coinages or revivals were adopted during his lifetime by his critics themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Let us leave our poet with an excerpt from his jewel-like essay on Shelley—an excerpt which, prose though it may appear, is the poetry of a soul who understood the poetry of childhood and himself retained, though scarred he was in the retaining, the holiness of a child of grace. Here is the corollary to "Ex Ore Infantium." "Know you what it is to be a child?" asks Francis, the child of St. Francis. And this is his reply:—

"It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe

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in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour;

it is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death. When we become conscious in dreaming that we dream, the dream is on the point of breaking; when we become conscious in living that we live, the ill dream is but just beginning."

Rather the good dream was just beginning, not the unnatural dream induced by laudanum, not the fickle dream of fame, not the poet's imagination, but the realized dream of sighting over the border the plenitude of Beatific Vision, when, still a child but with the Cross shadowed behind him, Francis Thompson, Tertiary, rode with the Hound of Heaven into the Setting Sun.

<sup>1</sup> Maynard: *Carven from the Laurel Tree*, p. 2 (B. H. Blackwell, Oxford, 1918).

<sup>2</sup> Everard Meynell: *The Life of Francis Thompson*, p. 158, fifth & revised edition (N. Y.: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1926).

<sup>3</sup> The poem, much too long and well known for reprint here, can

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be found in most anthologies—Walsh, Le Gallienne, Shane Leslie, George Carver, etc.; or see the three-volume edition of *The Works of Francis Thompson* (Burns, Oates, London), or *Selected Poems of F. T.* (John Lane Co.). A new and authoritatively annotated one-volume *Poems of Francis Thompson* has been edited with biographical and textual notes by the Rev. Terence L. Connelly, S.J., Ph.D. (New York & London: The Century Co., 1932).

<sup>4</sup> J. L. Garvin, in *The Bookman*, March, 1897.

<sup>5</sup> E. Meynell, *opus cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> As Katherine Brégy says in her delicate study of Francis, "Only a little band—the poets, the elect, and sundry of those whose eyes had by miracle been opened—knew him. They, after all, were the only ones whose praise could have signified to the man himself" (*The Poet's Chantry*, p. 142. B. Herder, St. Louis; Herbert & Daniel, London, 1913).

<sup>7</sup> Tinker: *The Good Estate of Poetry*, p. 214 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1929).

<sup>8</sup> Musser: *The Passion Called Poetry*, p. 14 (Atlanta, Ga.: Bozart Press, 1930).

<sup>9</sup> According to *Beacock's Concordance*, Thompson coined over 130 words. See Everard Meynell, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114.

### III.

#### *"Little Fool of Christ"*

OUR Holy Father St. Francis has an appeal for all peoples and all times; he is, as the late Maurice Francis Egan called him, "Everybody's Saint Francis." Never mind the fact that much modern love for him is sugary sentiment, or that he is too often pictured, as Giovanni Papini recently noted, as "a combed and smiling little saint with a pigeon on his shoulder," and that moderns "have diluted the consuming corrosive of his charity into a sweet watery mixture adapted to the mystical garglings of chlorotic and anaemic little Christians with a smattering of letters."<sup>1</sup> Allowing for these misreadings of the real Poverello, the fact remains that St. Francis does not belong to thirteenth-century Umbria, his message is universal and for all time; for as the perfect imitator of Christ he cannot be dated, he cannot be geographically fixed.

This world-wide exemplification applies to many

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of his friars and immediate followers, in rather less degree, however. Of Jacopone da Todi one must necessarily say, on the contrary, that he was a child of his time. It would be almost impossible to imagine him in twentieth-century America. And yet many of his *laude* ring as true today as in his epoch, and his poetry of what may be called divine audacity has an attentive, if startled, audience in our own time. It is only himself who cannot be understood, who cannot, perhaps, even be revered, unless we transport ourselves, in philosophical outlook, in exuberance of pleasure-lust and penitence and self-degradation and the very foolishness of divine love, to Italy of the thirteenth century, to Umbria, to Todi, and see with his eyes, hate with his zeal, love with his passion, sing with his abandon. Otherwise we might as well leave him out of the picture, out of our studies of Franciscan poets. He definitely belongs to that hazy dawn of the Renaissance. More perhaps than any other among the early friars, Jacopone was the typical singer of the Franciscan movement. He was the first great Italian writer of philosophic religious poetry. He is among the most profound and individual of thirteenth-century mystics. He was one of the first Tuscans, as Renzo Rendi has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> to unmask the artificial culture to which the scant interest of Italian literature bears testimony, and to breathe upon the stagnant literature of those times the

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warm breath of a new life. According to Francesco de Sanctis, Jacopone was imitated by Dante and by Tasso.<sup>3</sup> After centuries of neglect, his place in Italian letters is secure. He stands on an equal plane with the fathers of that literature, Guido Guinicelli, Guittone d'Arezzo and Brunetto Latini. But in his personal characteristics he is unique, he is perhaps the most picturesque figure in the history of his country's literature.

In September of 1930 Todi kept the probable seventh centenary of her great religious poet.<sup>4</sup> St. Francis had been assumed to glory but four years previously and canonized but two years, when to the noble family of the Benedetti of Todi, that pleasant little town between Perugia and Rome and not far from Assisi, was born to affluence their son Jacomo.

He lived in stirring, in thrilling, times, while great names were being indelibly written into history. The reign of the Emperor Frederick II, deposed by Pope Innocent IV, was nearing its end when Jacomo was a child, but the son of the Benedetti lived throughout the reigns of the holy cousins, St. Ferdinand, Tertiary, King of Castile and Leon, and St. Louis, Tertiary, King of France. King Edward I of England, and Edward's defeated harasser Llewellyn II, last independent Prince of North Wales, made Britain lively, while Stephen V ruled in Hungary and Charles of Anjou was King

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of Sicily and Naples. Robert the Bruce, most heroic of Scottish kings, was crowned at Scone the year of our poet's death. Jacomo's was coincident with the career of that great Father General of the Friars Minor, St. Bonaventure, and of the prince of theologians the Friar Preacher St. Thomas Aquinas. Our Mother St. Clare lived during his youth; a year or so after his birth there were greeted in heaven St. Antony of Padua, the Franciscan Thaumaturgist, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Patroness of Tertiaries; two of the first companions of St. Francis, the holy Brothers Leo and Rufino, were still living at the Portiuncula when Jacomo entered the Order; he knew the great leader of the Spiritual party, John of Parma; he witnessed the career of St. Angela of Foligno; Friar Roger Bacon was his contemporary in England. The great painter Giotto worked on walls of the Basilica of St. Francis at Assisi during Jacomo's days. Jacopone da Todi was indeed a link between the survivors among our holy Founders' first companions and the friars and nuns of the succeeding generation who had never known St. Francis or St. Clare. He lived during the reigns of eighteen Supreme Pontiffs, two of whom have been canonized. Others among our poet's contemporaries included Salimbene degli Adami, Franciscan chronicler (1221-1288); Bl. Francis of Fabriano, Friar (1251-1322); St. Philip Benizi, Servite (1233-1285); St. Gertrude the Great, Benedictine (1256-1301); the immortal Dante Alighieri

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(1265-1321). Petrarch was born two years before our poet's death; both Dante and Petrarch were enrolled among our Tertiaries. In view of Jacomo's career as a lawyer and Franciscan, it is interesting to note, in Brittany, his contemporary St. Yves Helori (1253-1303), priest, lawyer, Tertiary, Patron Saint of Lawyers.

Those were great days, the days when sands in the hour glass were granules of import seen to our time—days of the building of Gothic marvels in stone all over Europe; days of the founding of the great universities in Italy, Spain, England, Germany and Ireland; days when the Crusades were holy wars fought under saints; days of poets, of music, of painting, of stained glass, of never-again-equalled architecture. And Messer Jacomo dei Benedetti da Todi was not the least of the glories of what has been called "The Thirteenth, the Greatest of Centuries."

His life was equally divided, thirty-eight years during which he belonged to the world, thirty-eight years in which he belonged to Christ. For thirty-eight years he believed himself one of the powerful people of the world. Was he not a nobleman, a graduate of Bologna, the most famous school of law at the time, a doctor of law, a *procuratore*, a social leader, the proud and happy bridegroom of the beautiful Vanna, daughter of Bernardino, Count of Coldimezzo? What more could one ask?

But one day this fairyland came tumbling down



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like a house of cards, and all his ideals were changed in the twinkling of an eye. At a public festival, the fair Donna Vanna, all in her rich raiment, was the center of admiration and Jacomo had never seen her more beautiful. Suddenly a balcony collapsed; out of all that multitude, Giovanna alone was fatally crushed. When the poet ran to her side and unlaced her to discover her injuries, he found for the first time that she wore haircloth next to her tender flesh. The blow caused by his bride's death, together with the evidence of her penance for his sins, changed him completely. She died to the flesh; he would die to the world. And thereafter, for his second period of thirty-eight years, he longed to be despised and to be counted as nothing.

Prudent, he became a fool; rich, he cast away everything; clad in silk, he went about in rags or the habit of a Tertiary (*bizochone*); doctor of law, he rejoiced to be laughed at as an ignoramus; avaricious maker of contracts, he became a poet of poverty; nobleman, in the public square he crawled on all fours, saddled and bridled like an ass. He abandoned his profession, gave his all to the poor, became a beggar and a fool indeed. His folly was however the sweet folly of the Cross, as he says in his Todine-Umbrian vernacular:

*Senno me pare e cortesia  
Empazir per lo bel Messia.*

[A wise and courteous choice he'd make  
Who'd be a fool for the dear Lord's sake.]

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His completed conversion was not instantaneous, —two years after his revolt from the world he must still in honesty write:

*Ben io so'l pazzo maggiore  
che conosco el mio errore.  
Tanto lume ho dal Signore  
che per lui morir dovria.*

[Well do I know the greater fool, for I see my  
erring ways.

The Lord has given me such light that I should be  
glad to die for Him.]

But his determination to be counted a fool, to forget the world and be forgotten by the world, to abandon himself utterly to the love of God, was an immediate resolve, from which he never deviated. Henceforth always he sang only as penitent or as lover of the divine in a fury and intensity of love, the very *ebrieza d'amore*.

*Poiché lo saper de Dio  
è empazato de l'amore,  
que farai, o saper mio?  
Non vol gir po' 'l tuo Signore?  
Non pòi aver maiur onore  
ch'en sua pazia conventare.*

[For since God's wisdom, though so great,  
In all intoxicate with love,  
Shall mine not be inebriate?  
And so be like my Lord above?  
No greater honor can I prove  
Than sharing His insanity.]

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Ten years after his conversion, Ser Jacomo sought admission into the Order of Friars Minor, and was received in the great convent of San Fortunato at his native town; out of humility he chose to be a lay brother always. Says the *Vita*:

“And when the end of ten years had come, Divine grace inspiring him, he perceived this state of freedom to be very dangerous, although it was of great perfection for the mortification of the self, and the true grounding of the spiritual life. And therefore he thought within himself that he would take up a life more certain to save his soul. And having dwelt for some time in this thought, and made much orison to God concerning it, he was at last inspired by God to enter the religion of the Friars Minor, as the religion which is the most detached and alien from the world, and nearest to the life of Christ and His holy apostles.”

Fra Jacopo, or Jacopone, as he was ever thereafter called, now gave his lyre wholly to God. His poems, unaffected, transparently sincere, simple, at times crude and even rough in expression, but profound in feeling and tender in sentiment, touch the extremes of the spiritual life. As Miss Evelyn Underhill so truly says (and Franciscans owe that non-Catholic writer an abiding gratitude for her sympathetic spiritual biography of our poet) <sup>5</sup>, his *laude* and other poems “form an unbroken chain from the sinner to the seraph; linking the least impressive aspects of folly and sin, the plain rules of Christian

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ethic, with man's loftiest intuitions of Eternal Love. Every side of his complex nature, wide range of interest, and spiritual vicissitudes, is represented in these songs, which include drama, satire, sermon, and rhapsody." His favorite stanzaic form is the true *lauda*, a derivative of the *ballata* which was reserved for religious verse; he also employs several varieties of the *serventese*, rhymed couplets, the common stanza of early Italian narrative and satirical poems. He nearly always uses the eleven-syllabled line, but obtains a considerable range of effect by variation of the stresses.

This charming trifle, an instance of Jacopone's ability to turn from the depth of agony in contemplation of the Passion to a rollicking delight, is one of his poems of what I call his divine audacity. The translation is by Anne Macdonell.<sup>6</sup>

### THE LITTLE ANGELS

The little angels join their hands  
And dance in holy ring.  
Love-songs they're whispering,  
The little angel bands.

Good men and bad they call and great;  
High glory doffs its crown.  
And has come down,  
Low lies there at your feet.

Now, shamefaced boors, why keep  
Ye back? Show courtesie.  
Hasten and ye will see  
The little Jesus sleep.

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The earth and all the skiey space  
Break into flowery smiles,  
So draws and so beguiles  
The sweetness of His face.

To write of the poetry of Jacopone da Todi and to omit mention of that tenderest and most poignant Latin hymn of the Middle Ages, the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, were akin to a history of Rome without the Pope. And yet it is not at all certain, indeed it is still quite undetermined, that Jacopone was the author either of that great hymn of the Passion or of, likewise assigned to him, that lesser known, less beautiful, non-liturgical Christmas hymn, *Stabat Mater Speciosa*. They are probably by the same author, intended as companion pieces; that much seems obvious, though even this is debated. Authorship has been variously ascribed and over a period of centuries, from Pope St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) to Pope Gregory XI (d. 1378). It is generally agreed, however, that this can be narrowed down to one of two names, Pope Innocent III (d. 1216) and Jacopone da Todi. Between them the consensus of opinion since the fifteenth century is rather in favor of Jacopone. The *Stabat*, a favorite processional hymn of the fourteenth-century Flagellants, has certain markedly Franciscan characteristics, notably two stanzas which, held to infer indirectly to the Stigmata of St. Francis, are inspired by a view of the Passion especially

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dear to Jacopone and they could be matched by several passages in his authentic works:

*Fac ut portem Christi mortem  
passionis eius sortem  
et plagas recolere.  
Fac me plagis vulnerari,  
cruce fac inebriari,  
in amore filii.*

[Make me in mysterious fashion  
Share my Saviour's death and passion  
Bear the wounds He bore for me:  
In those wounds be my salvation,  
In His Cross my exaltation,  
In His love mine ecstasy.]

To Jacopone are ascribed very few Latin poems, nearly everything of his being in what might be called Todine-Umbrian. This, however, would not militate against his employment, in a serious work, of Latin, with which language as lawyer and as friar he was of course fluently familiar. The warmth, the tenderness, the intensity of the *Dolorosa* bespeak the pen of Jacopone rather than of the Pope's "great and cold intellect," as Gregorovius terms Innocent III. A whole literature has grown up around the "Stabats," especially the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, and not a little of that literature is fruitless argument concerning authorship. We are satisfied to say, simply, that the hymn is generally ascribed to Jacopone, and as such is given in Dom Matthew

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Britt's historical work, *Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*.<sup>7</sup> There are more than sixty English translations, three of which are in Mr. Orby Shipley's *Annus Sanctus*; the most extensively used is that by Father Edward Caswall, commencing—

At the Cross her station keeping,  
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
Close to Jesus to the last:

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
All His bitter anguish bearing,  
Now at length the sword had passed.

The Anglican hymnologist, Dr. John Mason Neale, introduced the *Speciosa* to the English world in 1866 and ascribed it to Jacopone; there is an interesting translation by Dr. Thomas Walsh in his own compilation, *The Catholic Anthology*.<sup>8</sup>

Not the peace of conformity to God's will, not even his own mystical union with Christ, nor his ascent of the ladder of sanctity could change completely that fiery spirit we knew as Jacomo dei Benedetti. His life in Religion was never one of inaction, and for several years, in the late evening of his pilgrimage on earth, he suffered imprisonment, an incarceration due to the excess of his love, excess of his fervor to retain the ideals of St. Francis. His zeal had naturally led him to and kept him among those friars known as the "Spirituals," or *zelanti*, who strictly observed the primitive Rule, as contrasted to the "Community" or *relaxati*. Boniface

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VIII, who had under unusual circumstances succeeded that saintly friend of the Spirituels, Celestine V, having revoked the privileges granted by his predecessor and having engaged in a struggle with the Spirituels' protectors, the two Cardinals Colonna, Jacopone took sides against the Pope and was imprisoned at Palestrina. He went to prison singing, for he felt he had been faithful to the ideals of St. Francis in not standing with those who had sought to mitigate both letter and spirit of the Rule. Some of his most touching, and also most aggressive, poems were composed in the dungeon of Castel San Pietro. Indeed, it is probably, or chiefly, due to his satires against Boniface VIII that the cause of his canonization has not advanced beyond proof of a *cultus ab immemorabili*, though for centuries he has been called Beato Jacopone and is so called in the inscription on his tomb at Todi, composed by Bishop Cesi in 1596: "*Ossa. Beati Jacoponi. De Benedictis. Tudertini. Fratris Ordinis Minorum. Qui stultus propter Christum. Nova mundum arte delusit. Martii. An. Dom. MCCXCVI. Ang. Caes. Episc. Tudert. Hic collocavit ann. MDXCVI.*" "Here lie the bones of Blessed Jacopone dei Benedetti da Todi, Friar Minor, who, having gone mad with love of Christ, by a new artifice deceived the world and took Heaven by violence. . . ." <sup>9</sup> The date in this inscription, March 1296, is, by the way, obviously erroneous. There is no doubt as to the correct date, just after midnight of December 25,



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1306, at the moment when the celebrant was singing the Gloria in Excelsis Deo at midnight Mass.

Yes, at that exquisite moment, in the peace of the Poor Clares' convent of San Lorenzo, at Collazzone, near Todi, our tattered-tunic knight, his days of pleasure and wealth long, long past, his thirty-eight years as penitent, as friar, as saint, now at their apogee, the poet who loved Christ so intensely that he delighted in being called His little fool, and whose love had so long poured forth in *laude* of passionate beauty, was at last slipping quietly into the peace of Sister Death. He had been released from prison upon the death of Boniface VIII; he had found again his brothers of the Spiritual party, they who had answered Peter to his face in order to retain their holy poverty and Rule intact; he had lived, an old man, at the hermitage of Pantanelli; now at the last the Poor Ladies of St. Clare had given him use of a cell in which to breathe out his soul. His faithful friend, Bl. John of Alvernia, arrived just before the poet's death. There was a burst of music in the chapel. It was past midnight. It was the Nativity of Jesus, a day beloved by children and Franciscans everywhere. And then, suddenly, it was Heaven.

*son tranquillati i venti  
de li passati tempi,  
fatta e la pace del temporegiare.*

The winds that were aforetime fall and cease,  
The storms are over, all is peace.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Papini: *Laborers in the Vineyard*, pp. 82, 83; trans. by Alice Curtayne (N. Y.: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930).

<sup>2</sup> Renzo Rendi, Rome correspondent, in *New York Times Book Review*, 2 Nov., 1930.

<sup>3</sup> "From his impetuosity come ways of saying things that are so fresh and right that even Dante and Tasso imitated him"—Francesco de Sanctis: *History of Italian Literature*, vol. i, p. 38; trans. by Joan Redfern (N. Y.: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1931).

<sup>4</sup> The precise date of his birth cannot now be absolutely verified. The oldest of his biographies go back only to the fifteenth century, although earlier records exist. Some writers give his natal year as 1228, some as Sept., 1230, some, believing in safety always, assign his birth simply to "the first half of the thirteenth century," which, of course, no one ever doubted.

<sup>5</sup> *Jacopone da Todi, Poet and Mystic*, by Evelyn Underhill (J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London, Toronto, 1919; E. P. Dutton & Co., New York). For interesting chapters on Jacopone, see *The Franciscan Poets in Italy of the Thirteenth Century*, by Frederick Ozanam; translated and annotated by A. E. Nellen and N. C. Craig (David Nutt, London, 1914). The book, however, is out of print and rare. I could tell you an amusing story about my copy.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Catholic Anthology*, by Thos. Walsh, pp. 75, 76 (Macmillan, 1927).

<sup>7</sup> Benziger Bros., 1924; p. 134.

<sup>8</sup> Pp. 73-75.

<sup>9</sup> Translation of Knox-Little.

<sup>10</sup> See Underhill, *opus cit.*, p. 231.

## IV.

### *"Roman and Utopian More"*

THERE is a poem by Charles Williams in which Blessed Thomas More is epitomized in a few words; it is an exact snapshot:

He who bore  
King's wrath, and watched the sacred poor,  
O Roman and Utopian More!

Roman he was in his unswerving spiritual fealty, even to the point of waiving a quibble that might have saved him his head; Utopian he was in his idealism, in his alliance of Renaissance subtlety and English common-sense, his union of speculative political mind and explicit faith and confidence in God, his wedding of philosophy and rare rich humor, the Greek spirit of his irony combined with his Humanism and both with his childlike simplicity. He coined the word that has been welded so inseparably into our language, so that utopian has

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come to stand for our deepest dreams almost impossible of realization.

And yet his best-known prose work, first published in Latin at Louvain in 1516, cannot be fully enjoyed, certainly not fully comprehended without an intimate knowledge of his far finer, though lesser known, last work. The subtle, the somewhat veiled *Utopia* is interpreted only upon reading the blessed martyr's final creative writing, penned in his last months in the Tower, the wonderful *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*. Here you have the saint where before you had the idealistic lawyer. In his other chief writings, the *Life of Pico della Mirandola* and the *Life of Richard III*, we find chiefly the philosophical biographer. It is only in the very beautiful *Dialogue*—and in his poems—that we come to know intimately the texture of the soul of him who has been called "England's merriest Chancellor," the last product of Merrie England in her merriment of the Ages of Faith. To quote myself, if I may, in an essay called "Cradle Literati,"—"As a tiny toddler Tom More's wit and love of study caused him to be singled out from his companions for the delight of his seniors. He studied for the love of study, he wrote for the sheer joy of writing; he was not a hothouse plant, so he grew. And who will deny that of his time Sir Thomas More, Lord High Chancellor of England, was the perfect type of statesman, patriot, judge, critic, creative writer?"<sup>1</sup>

## "ROMAN AND UTOPIAN MORE"

Born in London, 7 February, 1477, Thomas lived to be sole surviving son of Sir John More, barrister and later judge, by his first wife Agnes, daughter of Thomas Graunger.

The lad was early sent to St. Antony's School in Threadneedle Street, where his classical precocity won such acclaim that at thirteen he was placed in the household of Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor. Here again his brilliant intellect and native wit marked him above his fellows. He learned to play the flute and viol; studied French, history and mathematics, he mastered Greek "by an instinct of genius," while he soon learned to speak Latin "with the same facility as in his own language," according to his contemporary Pace.

At length his somewhat parsimonious sire was persuaded by the Cardinal to support Thomas at Oxford, and the boy entered Canterbury Hall (subsequently absorbed by Christ Church College) about 1492. After two years he was recalled to London and entered as a law student at New Inn; later he studied at Lincoln's Inn and in due course was called to the outer bar and subsequently made a bencher.

He became lecturer on law at Furnival's Inn and his star rose. The greatest scholars became his friends. Erasmus was proud of his friendship and never wavered; the brilliant Colet, Dean of St. Paul's, became his confessor. With William Lilly he

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translated epigrams from the Greek Anthology into Latin; by way of contrast, he delivered, in the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry, a series of lectures on St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*!

During this time he wrote many poems, especially translations from Latin, Italian and French. One that is occasionally found in anthologies is "Consider," from the Italian of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola:

Consider when thou art moved to be wroth,  
He Who that was God and of all men the best,  
Seeing Himself scorned and scourged both.  
And as a thief between two thieves threst,  
With all rebuke and shame; yet from His breast  
Came never sign of wrath or of disdain,  
But patiently endured all the pain—

Think on the very lamentable pain,  
Think on the piteous cross of woeful Christ,  
Think on His blood beat out at every vein,  
Think on His precious heart carved in twain;  
Think how for thy redemption all was wrought,  
Let Him not lose what He so dear hath bought.

The young lawyer's scintillant wit and satire contrasted with his asceticism and devotion strangely: he wore a hair shirt, he spent whole nights in prayer with the Carthusian monks at their London Charterhouse and again with the Observant Franciscans. His mind wavered for some time between

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the two Orders, and there were insistent rumors that he was about to take the tonsure and vows and become a friar-priest. In the end, apparently with the approval of Colet, he abandoned the hope of priesthood in religion, but he did not wholly, then or thereafter, separate himself from the friars he had come to love, though mistrustful of his powers of perseverance under vow. He was a Franciscan at heart, both in his religious fervor and in his happy disposition; that these attributes remained with him all his days is doubtless due in part to the fact that he became a Franciscan in fact though remaining in the world—he was enrolled as a Tertiary in the Seraphic Order.

It was at about this time he wrote that tenderly beautiful poem, "Consider Well," his own composition so like yet so superior to his above-quoted translation from Pico della Mirandola.

Consider well that both by night and day  
While we busily provide and care  
For our disport, our revel and our play,  
For pleasant melody and dainty fare,  
Death stealeth on full sily; unaware  
He lieth at hand and shall us all surprise,  
We wot not when nor where nor in what wise.

When fierce temptations threat thy soul with loss  
Think on His Passion and the bitter pain,  
Think on the mortal anguish of the Cross,

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Think on Christ's blood let out at every vein,  
Think of His precious heart all rent in twain;  
For thy redemption think all this was wrought,  
Nor be that lost which he so dearly bought.

The question of religious vocation being disposed of, More turned to his work at the Bar and his name was soon a byword, for great-heartedness, on the lips of the public. Through his spirited protest a tax of £113,000 levied by the King on the people was reduced to £30,000; Henry did not forgive this astute lawyer's war on the tax, and punished him by committing More's father to the Tower for a time. Again is Charles Williams' poem applicable:

He who bore  
King's wrath, and watched the sacred poor.

And in this watchfulness of the sacred poor, we see More the Franciscan.

Royal rage served only to endear the young lawyer to his public. In 1510 he was made Under-Sheriff of London, and four years later was appointed by Cardinal Wolsey as one of an embassy to Flanders to protect the interests of English merchants. It was during this absence from England that he began his most famous work, *Utopia*.

Meanwhile he had married, twice. His first wife, the mother of his three children, was Jane, daughter of "Maister John Colte, a gentleman" of Newhall, Essex. Soon after her death, in 1511, he married a



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widow, Alice Middleton, a good soul seven years his senior, excellent housewife, devoted foster-mother to his young children, but incapable of intellectual companionship with her lord who with his friends would converse in French or Italian and jest in Latin.

Wolsey and the King saw in More a rare scholar and judicial mind, a patriotic fervor and an extraordinary piety. It was, of course, chiefly his patriotism, his loyalty to the Crown, that caused Henry to see the asset he had in Thomas More. Favors now poured upon him, and his own worth merited them all.

He was granted a pension of £100 for life, was made member of an embassy to Calais, became a privy councillor, was in Henry's suite at the "Field of the Cloth of Gold," was knighted (1521) and made sub-treasurer to the King, was given grants of land in Oxford and Kent, was elected Speaker of the House of Commons on Wolsey's recommendation, became High Steward of Cambridge University, was made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. As noted by Dom Roger Huddleston in his monograph on Bl. Thomas More,<sup>2</sup> in 1523 Sir Thomas purchased a piece of land in Chelsea, where he built himself a mansion about a hundred yards from the north bank of the Thames, with a large garden stretching along the river. Here at times the King would come as an unbidden guest at dinner time, or would walk in the garden with his arm

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around More's neck enjoying his brilliant conversation. But More had no illusions about the royal favor he now enjoyed. "If my head should win him a castle in France," he said to Roper, his son-in-law, in 1525, "it should not fail to go." Just ten years later More's head did go, without even the paltry excuse of another castle for the Tudor harem.

With the passing of Wolsey from power and More's succession, in October, 1529, to the highest judicial office in the realm, that of Lord High Chancellor, a post never before held by a layman, our poet-historian began to be a martyr as well as a statesman and saint. I think he knew whither he was bound. He never lessened his jovial discourses nor his happy smile, notwithstanding this foreknowledge. He was not afraid. He kept his high heart to the end. Think of any modern Prime Minister of England wearing a hair shirt under his robes of office, under his vestments as Knight of the Garter! Think of a modern Premier spending his nights in adoration before the tabernacle, or writing romantic phantasies of an imaginary ideal kingdom, or pouring forth poems in Greek and Latin, or refuting heretics in profound theological discourses! Think of a modern Judge of a Supreme Court going to prison and to the stake with a smile in his eyes and a cross on his breast and a merry *bon mot* on his lips—a modern Prime Minister going gaily to death because he will not call the Tudor bigamist Supreme Head of the Church!

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The great test was not long pending. By royal proclamation the clergy were ordered to acknowledge Henry as "Supreme Head" of the Church "so far as the law of Christ allows." The Chancellor at once proffered his resignation; it was not accepted. The qualifying clause in the royal self-assumed title was regarded by many as a loophole through which lives might be saved and estates retained and souls kept within the fold. "So far as the law of Christ allows" was understood with a mental reservation, for well the educated knew the law of Christ allowed no lay sovereign supreme headship of the Church, in England or elsewhere. Let others accept the compromise as a defensible course, if conscience permitted them; for More there was only one course open. He weighed the evidence—and cheerfully went to martyrdom rather than escape by a bit of casuistry, rather than escape by what was similar to a slight flaw in a title deed. He balanced the world against his soul's peace—and gave his own verdict. Sir Thomas, Chancellor, had begun to be Blessed Thomas, Martyr. His opposition to Henry's designs in regard to the divorce and Papal Supremacy lost him the royal favor, and the Tudor arm no more encircled his neck. His land grants one by one were withdrawn and resumed by the Crown, his resignation of offices was accepted. He was summoned to Lambeth to take the oath of the Act of Succession (acknowledging issue of Henry and Anne Boleyn as legitimate heirs to the throne, to which was added

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a clause repudiating "any foreign authority, prince or potentate"), and upon his utter refusal to sign, was flung into prison. His Faith was utopian—and he won through to his true Utopia. He was a faithful subject of the King, as he declared to the end, but *because* he was faithful he would not see his king try to assume powers that were the prerogative of the Pope. Thus spoke Roman More.

He went gayly to martyrdom when it was certain, but he did not seek it. Like the great lawyer he was, his fight for his life in his trial at Westminster Hall was a superb fight. Any but a foresworn tribunal would have acquitted him of high treason. But his fate was predetermined.

In the Tower his old merriment came back to him. He joked with Lady More, with his children, with his friends, whenever they were permitted to see him; especially when with his favorite daughter, Margaret Roper, did his serenity and whimsicality show themselves. Only when alone were his long, long hours given over to prayer and penitential exercises, to the writing of an unfinished treatise on the Passion of Christ, to the aforementioned beautiful *Dialogue of Comfort*, to the creation of some of his finest poems. It was in those last days, in the Tower of London, he wrote "To Fortune":

My flattering fortune, look thou never so fair,  
Or never so pleasantly begin to smile,  
As though thou wouldst my ruin all repair,  
During my life thou shalt me not beguile.

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Trust shall I God, to enter in awhile  
His haven of heaven sure and uniform,  
Ever after thy calm, look I for a storm.  
Long was I, Lady Luck, your serving man,  
And now have lost again all that I got,  
Wherefore when I think on you now and then,  
And in my mind remember this and that,  
Ye may not blame me though I beshrew  
But in faith I bless you again a thousand times,  
For lending me now some leisure to make rhymes.

He went placidly to the scaffold on Tower Hill, 6 July 1535, innocently jesting all the way; he kissed the headsman, said the *Miserere*, leaned over the block. St. Francis had given another martyr to the Church.<sup>3</sup> In 1886 Blessed Thomas More was formally beatified by Pope Leo XIII. And in heaven a saint has "some leisure to make rhymes."

<sup>1</sup> Included in *Bensbook*, article "Cradle Literati," p. 128 (Oglethorpe University Press, Oglethorpe University, Ga., Dec. 1931).

<sup>2</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, xiv, 691.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning authorities for the statement that Bl. Thomas More was a Franciscan Tertiary, see list in *Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution in England*, by Francis Borgia Steck, O.F.M., pp. 75-6, nn., and read the whole of that eighth chapter in Father Francis' scholarly book (Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1920).

## V.

### *Voices from Spain and Portugal*

ALTHOUGH both now republics, to the distress of monarchists and romanticists, in the long centuries when arts and chivalry vied only with religion in popular interest the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal gave to the world of letters a goodly company of poets. It is in those past worthies we can glory today. Crowns or republics may come and go, but the indelible record left by the Muse will remain a nation's supreme achievement. So it is both of Spain and Portugal. Happily, in either country the Seraphic Order has dotted her own train of minstrels of God. It is noteworthy that the most famous figure in Spanish literature (if we except the author of the twelfth-century *Poema del Cid*) and the most famous in Portuguese, was, each, that of a Franciscan Tertiary—in Spain, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, in Portugal, Luis Vaz de Camões. Spanish literary and sacred history is in particular rich with its galaxy of friars and nuns

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of St. Francis, poets who have left a cumulative orchestral song in their didactic and moral poetry, their religious epics, their devotional *cantares*, their courtly *crónicas*.

The great Tridentine theologian, Fray Luis de Carvajal, and the celebrated Fray Alfonso de Castro had only a secondary interest in poetry; San Pedro de Alcántara (1499-1562) left but little poetry though himself every inch a sublime poet in his passion and eloquence, in his heroic asceticism. Yet even without these three, the Franciscan family, materially poor, was rich in the poetry of its Spanish and Portuguese children. In this limited space<sup>1</sup> we can but brush lightly over the golden heap, mentioning a few names, citing a poem or two.

BL. RAMÓN LULL (Raymond Lully), "Doctor Illuminatus" and Martyr, one of the most entrancingly interesting characters of his time and a glory of the infant Order, who would doubtless long since have been canonized were it not for a rationalistic mysticism in his philosophical teachings, was author of a great sheaf of devotional poems, written in Catalan. Born at Palma, Majorca, 1235, his life passion was the conversion of Islam. To this end he was priested as a Friar Minor, for this intent he studied Arabic and Chaldean; he lectured at Miramar, Montpelier, Rome, Paris; he founded a missionary school. In 1315, while on his second journey to Tunis, he was seized by Moslems and

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stoned to death outside the city of Bugia. In addition to nearly five hundred treatises on theology, philosophy, physics, medicine, mathematics and chemistry, he wrote the *Libre del orde de Cauayleria*, the *Libre de amich e amat*, *Horas de N. Doña Sta. Maria*, *Els cent noms de Deu*, and a fantastical novel, *Blanquerna*. His works were published in ten folio volumes at Mainz, 1721-42. Some of these have been translated in recent years by E. Allison Peers.<sup>2</sup> The poetry of this polygraph, whom Ernest Mérimée calls "one of the most remarkable mystics of Europe in the Middle Ages,"<sup>3</sup> is well represented by the following passage from "The Tree of Love," translated from the Catalan by Garret Strange:

The leaves of the Tree of Love are fears and sighs and tears.

The sighs are they that issue from the heart of the Lover who is full of love, so that it makes him to sigh for the exceeding great desire that he has for the Beloved and for the trials which he bears for love's own sake.

The tears of love are the streams that bathe the eyes, flowing therefrom because of love, to make the Lover know the trials, the griefs, the risks and perils that must be his who serves and honors his Beloved.

And the fears of love are witnesses that tell the sins the Lover has committed against love and the Beloved, and the afflictions with which they afflict him when his loving faints.

FRAY AMBROSIO MONTESINO must have known Christopher Columbus. The friar-poet was at-



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tached to the royal household of Castile-Aragon, and in this capacity devoted his poetry almost wholly to pious themes intended to edify the court and his protectress Isabel la Catolica. He attacked the vices of society with energy but, Franciscan-like, inserted in his loftiest spiritual *cancionero* a frequent echo of popular songs heard in romances and *coplas*, thus bringing every-day homeliness into the service of religion, the humble into the presence of the great. Incidentally, he thus helped elevate romantic verse, scorned by Santillana, in the esteem of the cultured. He made a prose translation of the *Vita Christi* by the Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony. His *Cancionero* was published in 1508.

FRAY IÑIGO DE MENDOZA, also, was a friar favored at the court of Isabella the Catholic. His devotional *Cancionero* was printed about 1482. Its chief poem is a *Vita Christi*, in double *quintillas*. In it is embedded a sort of Christmas play. Here is a charming translation, by Roderick Gill, of Mendoza's "Chant of the Ninth Order of Seraphim":

Joy is everywhere on earth,  
Gladness throughout Limbo waking;  
Feasts in honor of the birth  
Of Maria they are making;  
Sorrow can no haven find;  
Noon's without a cloud attended,  
For today doth humankind  
Hail the Son of God descended

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Virgin body to assume,  
Our salvation to restore,  
Wiping out the stains and gloom  
With the power of Love once more!

FRAY DIEGO DE ESTELLA (1524-1578), friar, poet and mystical theologian, in addition to lofty spiritual verse was author of *Tratado de la vida de San Juan* (1554), *Tratado de la vanidad del mundo* (1574) and *Meditaciones devotísimas del amor de Dios* (1578).<sup>4</sup>

FRAY JUAN DE LOS ÁNGELES (1536?-1609), one of the great orators of his time, was a mystical poet and prose writer as well, and in his *Triunfos del amor de Dios* (1590)<sup>5</sup> uses, he says, in his interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, "the doctrine of the divine contemplative Denis (the Areopagite) and of Plato in the *Symposium*, because they, among all who have discussed the matter, deserve the palm." His suave eloquence may be admired also in the *Dialogos de la conquista del espiritual y secreto reino de Dios* (1595).<sup>6</sup>

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES SAAVEDRA (1547-1616), Spain's greatest novelist, whose enduring name, resting on his *Quijote* and a few *Novelas ejemplares*, without these would be known only to scholars and specialists. His poetry is, let us admit, second-rate, if we except some of the sonnets, an elegy and five so-called *redondillas castellanas* (actually *coplas reales*). His *Viaje del Parnaso* (1614)<sup>7</sup> is merely a long enumeration of contemporary poets lauded in

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conventional fashion. His pastoral romance *La Galatea* and his many other successful dramas have been forgotten by posterity. He is, however, universally known by what Ernest Mérimée calls "the most famous and most original book in all Spanish literature,"<sup>8</sup> a book which was "an accident, or if one prefers, a special grace, a stroke of genius, a miracle in Cervantes' literary life,"<sup>9</sup> a novel which, says J. D. M. Ford, "as a social document has never been surpassed in the annals of narrative fiction."<sup>10</sup> *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, says Byron, "smiled Spain's chivalry away," i.e., the romances of pseudo-chivalry of knight-errantry, not, let us rest assured, the chivalrous instinct. Moreover, "there was no man of that age more deeply imbued, as his life bears witness, with the true chivalrous spirit" (Charles Jarvis). Not since the invention of printing had there appeared up to that time a book which had so many readers, yet, as said the secretary of the then Archbishop of Toledo, "he who made all the world rich was poor and infirm, though a soldier and a gentleman." His whole life was one of adventure,—his trip to Rome in 1568 in the suite of the future Cardinal Acquaviva, the life injury to his hand in the Crusaders' decisive battle of Lepanto in 1571 (a victory immortalized by G. K. Chesterton in the greatest ballad of modern times); his capture by pirates in 1575 and imprisonment at Algiers and ransom by a monk, his marriage, his petty government posts, the

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publication of the first part of *Don Quijote* (Madrid, 1605), his struggles against poverty, his joining the Brotherhood of Slaves of the Holy Sacrament and of the Third Order of St. Francis (1609) and the literary society called the Academia Selvaje, then the physical decline and crash, and peace at the last, and the gentle death in a Madrid convent, attended by his Friars Minor. He was buried in the convent of Trinitarian nuns in the Calle de Humiladero, of which community his daughter Ysabel, widow, was a professed member; the nuns having removed later to a new site, the bones of all their dead were mingled in a common ossuary. "So closes a record as glorious and as calamitous as any in literary history, of one of the world's greatest benefactors, whom the world knew not, the very type and perfect embodiment of the highest Castilian nature, whom his country starved and who has made her immortal" (Jarvis).

LOPE FÉLIX DE VEGA CARPIO (1562-1635) was well described by Cervantes as "*el monstruo de la naturaleza*," "freak of nature" or "nature's marvel," a term which clung to him throughout his life. His real fame rests, of course, on his dramas, for it was with Lope as playwright that Spain began the era of her dramatic glory, and as dramatist he dominated the whole Golden Age. According to his friend and biographer, Perez de Montalvan, he wrote for the stage 1800 *comedias*—about 6,000,000 verses in assonance and rhyme in all the native

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and the borrowed Italian measures. In addition, he wrote about four hundred *autos sacramentales*, those startling manifestations of a people's faith in the most august of mysteries, besides numerous *loas* (prologues, curtain-raisers), *entremeses* (interludes), *sayonettes*, or the *Vidas de Santos* (dramatized versions of the lives of the saints), the tragic epic "Jerusalem Conquistada" (in which he sought to rival Tasso) and the mock-epic "Angélica" (extension of Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso"). Lacking Shakespeare's mastery over the tingling chords of passion, and writing too much and too easily to perfect his style, Lope de Vega nonetheless made Spain breathe and live in his creations. His is a national drama in the truest sense. In addition to the colossal bulk of his work for the stage, Lope attempted every form of literary composition. He wrote historical poems, notably "San Isidro Labrador" (1599), celebrating the patron saint of Madrid; he essayed the didactic in an *ars poetica*, or code of prosodic principles, which he entitled the *Arte nueva de hacer comedias*; in 1602 there appeared two hundred sonnets; in 1612 was published his *Quatro Soliloquios*, full of devout expressions in verse which contrast sharply with the author's mode of life; to the same year belongs his beautiful sacred pastoral, perhaps his most finished work in point of style, the *Pastores de Belén*. His history of Mary Stuart under the title *Corona trágica* (five books, in octaves, 1627), won him the title of

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Doctor of Theology and the Cross of the Order of St. John from Pope Urban VIII. Bouterwek in his *History of Spanish Literature* concludes that Lope de Vega must have tossed off with debonair nonchalance a total of 21,300,000 verses, and just a little prose. One wonders how this Niagara of poesy had time for the crowded other events of his life—his service in the Spanish navy and the part he took in the Armada's disastrous expedition against England, his service to the Duke of Alba, his two marriages, not to mention his unhappy *affaires du coeur* with various actresses, his penitential interludes and relapses, his studies for the priesthood after the death of his second wife, his reception of holy orders and fulfillment of obligations in that office, his admittance to the family of St. Francis as a Tertiary with the duties it involved. The showman was not absent even in his funeral directions: his magnificent *cortège* was so directed as to pass, in all its worldly grandeur, before the windows of a convent whither one of his daughters had gone, a nun, to expiate the disorders of his life.

SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ (1651-1695), though her poetry is influenced by Gongorism (extravagance, obscurancy, display of classical erudition), remains one of the most distinguished poets writing in Spanish that the Old World or Hispanic America has produced. Before becoming a Franciscan nun, Juana de Asbaje was noted both for her

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beauty and her learning at the viceregal court in New Spain (Mexico). To her earlier career belong her love lyrics and *redondillas*. Much of her later work, when she was hailed as the famous *Monja de Méjico*, "the unique American poetess," "the tenth Muse," was devout and mystical in character; an *auto sacramental* ("El divino Narciso") and a little comedy ("Los empeños de una casa") deserve particular mention. The *auto* is here given, the translation made by Roderick Gill:

Seeking Narcissus in my weariness,  
With never a rest to ease my vagrant feet,—  
In longing and distress  
From many days of journeying I greet  
Alone the hedges green,  
The only sign of where His step hath been.

Unto this bosky circle come, I yearn  
Some tidings of my Well-Beloved to find,—  
Though of the paths I learn  
That this hath been His meadow twined  
With flowery loveliness so rare  
Naught but His kisses could have nursed them there.

How many, many days I have explored  
The grove; and flower on flower, herb on herb,  
Scented and tasted! Yea, without reward—  
My heart a burden that my pains perturb,  
My step a draggled vagabond,—to rove  
Through time turned centuries, and worlds a grove!

SOR FRANCISCA JOSEFA DE LA CONCEPCION (or del Castillo) (1691-1743), Poor Clare, was born at Tunja, Colombia, and died there in the Convent of

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Santa Clara. She wrote an account of her life and spiritual experiences reflecting the mysticism of St. Teresa. Her works were published in 1817 in Philadelphia. Thomas Walsh made a sympathetic translation of her exquisite "Christmas Carol"—

The land grew bright in a single flower—  
One great Carnation rare—  
Against whose bloom no frost had power  
To dim its glowing hair.

Oh, was there ever such another  
So lovely for our lips to kiss,—  
To shine where earthly shadows smother,—  
A bud of Heaven, like this?

The sun behind the mists is clouded;  
Haste, shepherds, there to gaze!  
See Fire itself in ice beshrouded,  
And Ice in joy ablaze!

Although a bit long, I cannot resist quoting another of Sister Josefa's poems, also translated by Dr. Walsh, included in his *Catholic Anthology*. I give it the more readily inasmuch as this series on Franciscan poets rather stints the work of the Poor Ladies of Our Mother St. Clare. This is "The Holy Eclogue"—

Unto Salvation's spring  
Amid its thorny reeds  
There comes in pilgriming  
A weary heart that pleads  
Unto the Cross, on which it turns its eyes,  
The while it moans and lifts its ceaseless sighs:—



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"Thy servant, I, O Lord,  
Come thirsting for Thy streams;  
With sins so many scored  
That penance scarce redeems;  
Oh, from Thy presence hold me not away  
Unpardoned and unpitied, Lord, I pray!

"Upon the Cross nailed fast—  
That sign of peace displayed  
Thy full perfection! Cast  
Thy glance so long delayed,  
Let all my nature and my poor desire  
Embrace Thy light and flame and holy fire!

"Thou wert a God of wrath  
Unto the Prophets old;  
Today my spirit hath  
In Thee, made Man, grown bold;  
Since, God of love, we now behold Thee bound  
Without the arrows of Thy vengeance found.

"To keep me Thou hast shed,  
And sealed Thy love, in blood;  
And in the Holy Bread  
Prepared my sacred food;  
Let not my wandering senses lose  
The fruits of love and anguish so profuse.

"My sin has led me far  
As some wild thirsting bee  
Beneath Thy meadow star,  
Idly forgetting Thee;  
But Thou dost call me home; I hear  
Thy voice whose sweetness charms mine ear.

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"O Shepherd of the fold,—  
That seeks me through the beat  
Of tempests and of cold,  
As through the burning heat,—  
Let me not stray again, but keep  
Me folded fast amid Thy little sheep."

LUIS VAZ DE CAMÕES (1524-1580), called "the most sublime figure in the history of Portuguese literature," owes his lasting fame to his epic poem "Os Lusíadas" (The Lusíads), published 1572; he is remarkable also for the degree of art contained in his sonnets, odes, elegies, eclogues, *cancoes*, *redondilhas* and other poetic forms, and is less noteworthy for his three comedies in verse. Camoens is counted among our Tertiaries. A lugubrious sonnet, translated from the Portuguese by Richard Garnett, has a daring word repetition not the least of its dark beauty:

Leave me, all sweet refrains my lip hath made;  
Leave me, all instruments attuned for song;  
Leave me, all fountains pleasant meads among;  
Leave me, all charms of garden and of glade;  
Leave me, all melodies the pipe hath played;  
Leave me, all rural feast and sportive throng;  
Leave me, all flocks the reed beguiles along;  
Leave me, all shepherds happy in the shade.  
Sun, moon and stars, for me no longer glow;  
Night would I have, to wail for vanished peace;  
Let me from pole to pole no pleasure know;  
Let all that I have loved and cherished, cease;  
But see that thou forsake me not, my Woe.  
Who wilt, by killing, finally release.

## VOICES FROM SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

FREI AGOSTINHO DA CRUZ (1540-1619), one of the chief poets of the Portuguese Renaissance, joined the Franciscans in 1561 and soon thereafter became a friar-priest. Following the example of Sá de Miranda, who introduced Italian forms of verse in Portugal, Frei Agostinho raised the tone of poetry without losing his natural spontaneity in use of classical models. A sonnet, "To Our Saviour," is thus translated by Thomas Walsh—

When shall I, Lord, this mortal load untied,  
Be joined to Thee in union entire,  
Binding my soul in Thee Whom I desire,  
Beholding all for which in Thee I sighed?  
Wherefore should I upon such glory bide  
Who never felt the valorous battle fire;  
Enough, if but my weakness but aspire  
In love for Thee along the battle-side.  
This is the strength so potent for my needs;  
This is the fortifying of my sighs,  
That he who loves the most the most succeeds;  
Whatever pains I know, what paucity  
Or what unworthiness my step impedes,  
Loving, I shall attain Love's perfect free.

FREI ANTONIO DA FONSECA SOARES (1631-1682), after a dissipated youth in Brazil as a common soldier, was converted through the writings of Luis de Granada and through an illness; returned to Portugal and in 1662 entered the Franciscan Order, receiving in religion the name Antonio das Chagas. The fame of this Friar Minor spread as poet and ascetical writer and his erudition

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combined with his stylization have won his work a merited place among Portuguese classics.

<sup>1</sup> Good bibliographies of most of the poets mentioned in this paper can be found in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. See also James Fitzmaurice-Kelly: *Spanish Bibliography* (Oxford, 1925); *idem*: *A New History of Spanish Literature* (Oxford, 1926). Anthologies, chiefly in English, including work of our poets, are: J. D. M. Ford: *A Spanish Anthology* (New York, 1901); *idem*: *Old Spanish Readings* (Boston, 1911); Ida Farnell: *Spanish Prose and Poetry Old and New with Translated Specimens* (Oxford, 1920); James Fitzmaurice-Kelly: *The Oxford Book of Spanish Verse* (Oxford, 1913); *idem*: *Cambridge Readings in Spanish Literature* (Cambridge, England, 1920).

<sup>2</sup> *The Art of Contemplation*, 1925; *Blanquerna*, 1926; *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, 1923; *The Book of the Beasts*, 1927; *The Tree of Love*, 1926. Prof. Peers has produced *Ramón Lull, A Biography*, with Notes and Appendix, London, 1927. See also J. H. Probst: *Caractère et origine des idées du Bienheureux Raymond Lulle*, Toulouse, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> *History of Spanish Literature*, p. 263, by Ernest Mérimée, trans. by S. G. Morley (N. Y.: Henry Holt & Co., 1930).

<sup>4</sup> See E. Allison Peers: *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, vol. ii, 219-249.

<sup>5</sup> Recast in the *Lucha espiritual y amorosa entre Dios y el Alma* (1600).

<sup>6</sup> An admirable treatise on this poet is found in *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*, by E. Allison Peers, vol. i, pp. 345-405 (The Sheldon Press, London; Macmillan Co., New York, 1927).

<sup>7</sup> Ed. Schevill & Bonilla, 1922; Engl. trans. by J. Y. Gibson, London, 1883.

<sup>8</sup> *Opus cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>10</sup> *Cath. Encyc.*, iii, 544.

## VI.

### *The Creator and the Carver of Sonnets*

IT MAY be that the present reader is, like the present writer, fanatical on the subject of that queen of all verse forms, the sonnet. If so, for peace in the family, it is to be hoped our fanaticism be one of agreement. That is to say, it is to be hoped that you, too, regard the so-called English sonnets, mere quatorzains, really, or as Charles Lamb derisively called them, "fourteeners," as bastard forms, as rank apostasy from the ancient, dignified, single-thought, strict rhyme scheme of the sonnet perfected if not actually created by Francesco Petrararch.

The sonnet originated in thirteenth-century Italy, not in Provence, as French critics pretend. S. Waddington and several other critics have attributed its invention to Fra Guittone d'Arezzo. But J. A. Symonds reminds us that the sonnet beginning *Però ch' amore*, generally ascribed to Pier delle Vigne, secretary of state in the Sicilian court

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of Frederick, has claims which no student of early Italian poetry can ignore. Ariosto is another name with which to conjure, as he helped much to develop both the form and its popularity. But whoever may have been the actual inventor, unquestionably Petrarch contributed more than any other poet to the glorifying of the sonnet; among the earliest to use the form, Pier delle Vigne, Guittone, Ariosto and Petrarch, certainly his name is most closely associated with the sonnet in its perfecting and in its apogee. He was always faithful to the law, that each sonnet must contain one, and only one, idea, thought, feeling or sentiment, without irrelevant detail, introduced and developed in part in the octet, then a pause, and from another angle developed and concluded in the sestet, all contained within fourteen five-stress iambic lines—I refer, of course, to the line as written in English. Petrarch also was most faithful to the rhyme scheme; it is his plan that has survived among devotees of the pure sonnet as contradistinctive to the false Shakespearean, Spenserian and Wordsworthian models now so widely and unhappily imitated. As to rhyme scheme, Pier delle Vigne used two quatrains rhyming *abab abab*, followed by two tercets rhyming *cde cde*. Most of Ariosto's had the *cd cd cd* sestet. But the supreme sonnet, that wrought by Petrarch, usually had as octave *abba abba* and as sestet either *cde cde*, or *cd cd cd*, preferably the former. Here, then, we have the true sonnet, both as to thought

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development and rhyme scheme, in the only form recognized by poetic purists.

The following is a typical instance of our poet's work. This sonnet by Petrarch, from the Italian<sup>1</sup> by Dacre, even allowing some loss in translation by use of certain outmoded poeticisms and paleness of color, gives Francesco's pattern a lovely appliquée:

Father in Heaven! after the days misspent  
After the nights of wild tumultuous thought,  
In that fierce passion's strong entanglement  
One, for my peace too lovely far, had wrought;  
Vouchsafe that by Thy grace, my spirit bent  
On nobler aims, to holier ways be brought;  
That so my foe, spreading with dark intent  
His mortal snares, be foiled, and held at nought.

E'en now the eleventh hour its course fulfils,  
That I have bowed me to the tyranny  
Relentless most to fealty most tried.  
Have mercy, Lord! on my unworthy ills;  
Fix all my thoughts in contemplation high;  
How on the Cross this day a Saviour died.

With the English purloining, torturing and recasting *via* Wyatt and Surrey and their successors, Sidney, Spenser, Constable, Daniel and Shakespeare, we have what we have generally today, a pale ghost crying on the slopes of Parnassus. Of Shakespeare's 154 so-called sonnets, not one is regular either as to rhyme or thought development; 152 have the three-quatrain division followed by a couplet,

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*which, of course, defeats the very purpose of the sestet, as the couplet serves to emphasize rather than repress the last note.* Moreover, the 126th of Shakespeare's "sonnets" contains but twelve lines, while the 99th can boast fifteen! Custom, you might suggest, will sometimes soften heresy. But custom never will sanction apostasy. Fortunately on other than his fourteeners rests the universal fame of Master Will Shakespeare. Milton, while preserving the Petrarchan rhyme plan, generally discards the thought division, and in half of his sonnets has the pause, not after the eighth line but within the ninth. In this he was imitated by Wordsworth (after Warton and Bowles had revived the quatorzain following a century of sonnet silence); but Wordsworth, unlike Milton, was inobedient to the form as well. Today we have such parodies as a "sonnetino"—for example, one in *Sotto Voce*, by "Paul Tanaquil" (Jacques LeClerq), where the iambic pentameter line collapses into two-stress nursery jingle! A modernist tells me that if E. E. Cummings were to perpetrate a 156-line poem made up mostly of semicolons, and he were to call it a sonnet, it would *be* a sonnet *because Cummings said it was!* Another poet tells me he cannot help writing quantities of sonnets, "because they are so easy." He did half-a-dozen in my study one afternoon; and no wonder they were easy; the only resemblance they bore to a sonnet was in their number of lines!



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If the sonnet were a comparatively unimportant entity in prosody, this apologia for its strict adherence and this denial of orthodoxy to lesser adherence would be mere quibbling over locutions or ill-natured narrowness of vision. As it happens, however, the sonnet is not an elastic term to cover anything of fourteen lines; it is a fixed pattern embodying a fixed thought development; it is the Euclidian *pons asinorum* for dabblers in verse; it is the most dignified and beautiful of patterns; it has very justly been called the queen of all verse forms. And this perfect form is so forever wrapped up with the name of its first great exemplar, that to speak of a Petrarchan sonnet is to name the sonnet in its purest ray, its flowering, its glory.

This is not, however, to belittle the quatorzains in our language, many of them authentic and enduring poems. What I object to, what every traditional loyalist must object to, is the labeling of these bend sinister forms with the august name of sonnet. It were tantamount to saying the Salvation Army is composed of Franciscans. And it is a denial of Petrarch's place as creator and guardian of the true sonnet. And that heresy will not be countenanced by any poetic purist, unblushingly fanatical in his polemics, by any historian of Petrarch who seeks to enunciate his greatness in letters as the "first true reviver of learning in medieval Europe," as John Addington Symonds calls him, by any

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Franciscan of whose Third Order Petrarch was a secular member.

Always he was a poet in feeling and sensitivity, from his childhood days in Arezzo, where in Guittone's native town he was born, 20 July, 1304, and where he neglected his duties to play with rhymes and to discover the music of words, to his last hour at Arquá, where he died 19 July, 1374, on the very eve of threescore-and-ten; always he was a poet. Always a poet in love for letters and learning and in indifference to material pursuits when within his grasp; always a poet in his romantic imagination, rising to its heights in his glorification of that famous Laura whose actual existence is doubted by many critics; always a poet in his restlessness, his nostalgia, his wanderings through northern France and Germany; always a poet in his unconventionality.

But not, let us admit, always a Franciscan poet. For there were in his makeup strange contradictions, sensual semi-paganism vying with a tormented Christianity, a Rousseauesque precursion struggling with discipleship to St. Augustine, a Dantesque fidelity marked strongly with the brand of Cicero, Virgil and the ancients. He could be a parasite on the Colonnas (in whose train he first visited Rome in 1337), then suddenly turn ardently to the defense of the republican Cola di Rienzi; he could be a cleric in minor orders at the Papal Court at Avignon, yet write sonnets on Babylon

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and *sine titulo* epistles against Popes and Cardinals; he could write in praise of an ascetic and solitary life, yet at Rome eagerly accept a crown of laurels as poet and historian and enjoy regal and imperial friendships. A contradiction, yes—like most of us.

His father Ser Petracco intended the lad to enter the legal profession and so sent him to study at Montpellier and at Bologna. Francesco gave his time to *belles-lettres*, so incensing his sire that Ser Petracco burned the youth's favorite ancient authors. When the father died, 1323, Francesco returned to Avignon and took minor orders, which permitted him to enjoy ecclesiastical benefices and bound him only to daily reading of the Office. Somewhat later he became a Franciscan Tertiary.

It was on Good Friday of 1327 that, in the church of St. Clare at Avignon, the poet met Laura, inspiration of his most famous work. That was one of the two great moments of his life. The second occurred on Easter Sunday of 1341, when, at Rome, with great *éclat* in the presence of princes and multitudes, he was publicly crowned as poet and historian. The crowning was not an idle compliment. Petrarch had an encyclopedic knowledge. His letters are models of Greek, or of Latin more ornate than medieval Latin; his Latin epic, *Africa*, in hexameters, deals with historical exactitude with the Second Punic war. *I Trionfi*, written in *Terza rima*, is allegorical and moral. It is in his *Canzonieri*, his masterpiece, which he first called *Rerum*

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*vulgarium fragmenta*, that we find the full wealth of his genius. In this collection, consisting chiefly of sonnets, but also *canzoni*, *sestine*, *ballate* and *madrigals*, we have unquestionably one of the world's imperishable literary monuments, and Petrarch here shares with Dante and Leopardi the honor of being the most marvelous artificer of verses that Italian literature possesses. This typical sonnet, in honor of Laura, is called, in the English translation by Agnes Tobin, "The Flying Lesson"—

Sorrow and love did thrust me in the way  
Of bitter words that all too mournful rang  
To her for whom so long I flamed and sang—  
And: "Great has been my fault," I humbly say.  
For lo! My sorrow goes out at the door—  
And her great glory breaks its waves in foam  
Upon my heart. How well she is at home  
With Him, Whom, loving, in her breast she bore.

All my scars vanish—hushéd is my cry—  
I would not have her back again, O fates!  
No, no. Far rather lonely live and die!  
How plain I see the sapphire-studded gates—  
The vaporous angels coaxing her to fly—  
But near the Sacred Feet she sits and waits.

In his *Canzonieri*, according to Giovanni Papini, "Petrarch composed a complete poem on human love—with interludes of divine love—in which all the moments, aspects, crises and evanescent shades of feeling of this mysterious and most dominant of human passions are expressed, analyzed and il-

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luminated as no one could do it either before or after him.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us leave him with another quotation from Papini’s *Laborers in the Vineyard*:—

“And even if humanity ever became so brutalized, or so angelic, that one day Petrarch’s sonnets, *canzoni*, and *sestine* would be mere hieroglyphics without interest or meaning, still his poetry would live as a finely-modeled and vibrant joy so long as there was one person left in the world capable of savoring the ineffable and incomparable beauty of the Italian language. One must leave Dante apart in his position unique forever, as a metaphysical poet of native and massive strength. But considered as a pure artist in the music of words, Petrarch very, very nearly surpasses him. His pearly, translucent limpidity is truly magic, like a miracle of winning grace, that is renewed in every line and in every verse. The divine secret of Petrarch’s art lies in that sapphire brilliance of the right word inlaid into the right harmonies of rhythm, all the syllables and accents being colored more or less by the refraction of the main thought, according to its position in the theme. But thousands of plagiarists and mimics have not succeeded in profaning or vulgarizing that secret.”<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

Towards the end of his life, Michelangelo wrote these lines:

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*Che giova voler far tanti bambocci,  
se m'han condotto al fin come colui  
che passò 'l mar, e poi affogò ne' mocci?*

[What avails my ambition to make so many baubles, since they have brought me to the one end, like a man who traversed the ocean and then got drowned in a ditch?]

This was the Christian humility of greatness, the willingness to be esteemed as little, and the true artist's dissatisfaction with his work. Think of the humble heart that could look on his paintings, sculpture and architecture, in all three fields among the supreme work of his time and of all times, as "baubles!" He could not be self-satisfied with his gigantic task of reconstruction of St. Peter's at Rome, and of his design for its great dome, the drum of which was completed before his death; he was not elated by his world-famous painting of "The Last Judgment," on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, nor the ceiling murals; he was not vainglorious over his sculptures, over the consummate pathos of the marble "Pietà" in St. Peter's, over the statue of "David" now in the Academy at Florence, over the colossal "Moses" on the tomb of Julius II in S. Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, over the unfinished tombs of the Medici in the sacristy of S. Lorenzo, Florence.

Divine discontent urging him, even to the extent of liking his masterpieces to baubles, the genius that was Michelangelo Buonarroti turned in his later

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years to that supreme art, poetry and, partly under the inspiration of Vittoria Colonna, widow of the Marchese de Pescara, who became a center for the literary life in Rome where Michelangelo spent his last years, but chiefly under the inspiration of his own soul reaching out to that expression which could not find fruition in painting, in sculpture, or in architecture, he wrought his great cycle of sonnets and other poems. And nearly all his poetry is spiritual:—

### FOR INSPIRATION

The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed,  
If Thou the Spirit give by which I pray;  
My unassisted heart is barren clay,  
Which of its native self can nothing feed;  
Of good and pious works Thou art the seed  
Which quickens where Thou sayest that it may;  
Unless Thou show us then Thine own true way,  
No man can find it! Father, Thou must lead!

Do Thou, then, breathe those thoughts into my mind  
By which such virtue may in me be bred  
That in Thy holy footsteps I may tread;  
The fetters of my tongue do Thou unbind,  
That I may have the power to sing of Thee  
And sound Thy praises everlastingly.<sup>4</sup>

This prince among Renaissance artists, who stands with Leonardo supreme in versatility—a complete artist, lacking only music—was born at Caprese in the valley of the upper Arno, 6 March, 1475, scion of a noble but impoverished Florentine

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family. Apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandajo, he then studied in the palace of the Medici, where he lived with Lorenzo's sons and consorted with the great of Florence; later studied in the school of sculpture under direction of Bertoldo, pupil of Donatello. He was introduced by the poet Politian into the circle of scholars of the Academia. Michelangelo later studied anatomy by dissecting bodies, in a cell allotted for his use, in the monastery of San Spirito, and again at the house of Pietro de' Medici, also in studies at Bologna. In the wake of his fame, he went to Rome; in 1505 was called to the service of Pope Julius II, and thereafter was employed alternately at Rome and Florence by Julius and by his successors, Leo X, Clement VII and Paul III being his special patrons.

Intensely devoted to his friends, especially to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, love for whom was one of the most beautiful aspects of his life; generous to a fault to younger artists; humble even to the extent of expending his genius on a costume for the Papal Swiss guards and on a road construction, he was a delightful admixture of ascetic and comrade, warmly human and divinely humble; and though to English ears his poetry is far less familiar than are his paintings and sculptures to English eyes, it is precisely in his Dantesque and Petrarchan style of verses, his *canzoni* and especially his sonnets, that we know at last the real Michelangelo and feel most certainly the impress of his character. And here



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again his Franciscan Tertiary humility is evidenced, his humility as Christian poet. For he began a collection of verses for printing and then laid it aside, feeling himself unworthy; his poems were published by his nephew, almost a half-century after the master's death. What seems entirely merited was that estimate of a contemporary, when he said Buonarroti in all the ninety years of his life never gave any grounds for suspecting the integrity of his moral virtues.

Here is his sonnet on "The Defense of Night,"<sup>5</sup> composed during the long purple shadows in his house at Macel dei Corvi, when sculptor's tools were too heavy for his aged arm and his thoughts were the evening thoughts of the old coming into port:—

O night, O sweet thou somber span of time!  
All things find rest upon their journey's end—  
Whoso hath praised thee well doth apprehend;  
And whoso honors thee, hath wisdom's prime.  
Our cares thou canst to quietude sublime;  
For dews and darkness are of peace the friend;  
Often by thee in dreams upborne, I wend  
From earth to heaven, where yet I hope to climb.

Thou shade of death, through whom the soul at length  
Shuns pain and sadness hostile to the heart,  
Whom mourners find their last and sure relief!  
Thou dost restore our suffering flesh to strength,  
Driest our tears, assuagest every smart,  
Purging the spirits of the pure from grief.

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In all the sonnets of his old age are carven the beatitude and spiritual profundity not even his scalpel nor brush had fully depicted in marble or pigment. Here were painted words not those his paintings of the "Creation" and "Fall" had evidenced; here were sculptured words one could not see in the "Slaves," in "Day" and "Night," nor in that gigantic bubble the dome of San Pietro, most majestic of God's houses. Here, in his poetry, Michelangelo was at once painter and sculptor.

But he was more: he was a Franciscan, learning a new art in the kindergarten of saints. And as penitential follower of one who could say "I know Christ, poor and crucified," so Michael the Angel of the Buonarroti could write this sonnet,<sup>6</sup> "On the Crucifix,"—

The course of my long life hath reached at last  
In fragile bark o'er a tempestuous sea,  
The common harbor where must rendered be  
Account of all the actions of the past.  
The impassioned phantasy, that, vague and vast,  
Made art an idol and a king to me,  
Was an illusion, and but vanity  
Were the desires that lured me and harassed.

The dreams of love, that were so sweet of yore,  
Where are they now, when two deaths may be mine,  
One sure, and one forecasting its alarms?  
Painting and sculpture satisfy no more  
The soul now turning to the Love Divine,  
That hoped, to embrace us, on the Cross its arms.

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<sup>1</sup> A new translation of Petrarch's sonnets—and, as far as I can judge, the best that has ever been made of the collection as a whole—has been achieved by Joseph Auslander; this superb work was published October, 1931, by Longmans, Green & Co., New York (*The Sonnets of Petrarch*, translated by Joseph Auslander). The result increases both Mr. Auslander's secure fame and the veneration of non-Italian-speaking readers for that creator of sonnets who was long deemed the most popular of Italy's poets, Francesco Petrarch.

Here is Mr. Auslander's rendition of Sonnet LXXXVI ("*I vo piangendo i miei passati tempi*") :—

Weeping, I still regret the years that went  
In empty sacrifice to mortal things;  
No swooping starward, though my soul had wings  
Which might have brushed Thy burning element.  
O Thou, that know'st so well how I repent,  
Sovereign of space, immortal King of Kings,  
Succour the soul torn with self-torturings—  
To Thee it turns: O prove Thou provident!  
To my war-shattered life appoint Thou still  
Death as the port of peace; and if my course  
Was idle, let it find a quiet hill!  
O for the brief remainder, let remorse  
Not darken, let Thy hand the end fulfill!  
Thou know'st in Thee alone rests my resource!

<sup>2</sup> Papini: *Laborers in the Vineyard*, p. 7, trans. by Alice Curtayne (N. Y.: Longmans, Green & Co.).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> From the Italian by Wm. Wordsworth.

<sup>5</sup> From the Italian by John Addington Symonds.

<sup>6</sup> From the Italian by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

## VII.

### *"Saint of the Whole World"*

QUITE too many intelligent persons make the error of thinking of Poetry and Emotion as the brothers of Sentimentalism. They are not even fifth cousins.

To attempt a detailed presentation of the real St. Antony in contradistinction to the popular pictorial conception, that of a very young and pink sweet-faced friar embraced by the Divine Infant, would be a thankless task and probably an unwise procedure. And they who point out, in his bisque statues, the gold embroidery with which popular devotion decorates (or desecrates?) his brown habit, do so at the peril of being contemned as lapsed devotees. The prosaic actually out-poetize the poets, out-Franciscan the Franciscans, in celebrating this friar-poet of the thirteenth century.

Not Padua alone, but the whole world, has claimed him and in the claiming has in a measure separated him from the humble simplicity of the

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Seraphic Order to place him, pedestaled, in every church in Christendom, and to enshrine his chief relics in the Conventuals' exotic, seven-domed basilica called "Il Santo," a grandly incongruous edifice of dubiously Franciscan spirit, erected however not by our simplicity-loving friars but by a municipality bent on outdoing the mother shrine at Assisi.

The poet is forgotten in the thaumaturgist; that white flame the great preacher of righteousness is metamorphosed into a finder not of lost faith and morals but of lost health and pocketbooks and gew-gaws. He who set sail for Morocco to win martyrdom is made to share with St. Christopher a safe journey for speed-mad motorists (who seem to forget that Antony, sick and disheartened in his quest, re-embarking for his native Portugal was driven by storm to the coast of Sicily). Apparently the world thinks of him solely as a wonder-worker, popular hagiographers crediting him with miracles almost from his birth at Lisbon, in 1195, to the present hour of the present day.

The world remembers that he loved the poor, so it has erected a charity known as "St. Antony's Bread"; we recall that the translation of his relics to "Il Santo" occurred on a Tuesday, thirty-two years after his death, and that Padua and thence the whole earth made Tuesday peculiarly sacred to his memory, and that in this way the devotion of the "Nine Tuesdays" spread to all Christendom. But

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we conveniently forget that, if he was Antony the Franciscan for ten years, so also for an equal number of years previously he had been Fernandez the Augustinian. Italy has taught us to forget that he was not really a Paduan and became so only by the visitation of Sister Death near that city, whereas he was actually of Portuguese nativity and descent. Indeed, we have ceased to think of him even as "of Padua" but rather "of the Whole World"; for we all love and claim him as our own, turning that brilliant preacher of God and wooer of poverty into a daily miracle-worker for our own personal little conveniences and material benefits. The people's acclaim has in its sincere but awkward love somewhat alienated him from the true Franciscan ideal, without so intending, and this separation can not be too regretted. But what most should be deplored is, that he has been ultra-sentimentalized, even more than has been St. Francis and at least as much as the recently canonized "Little Flower" of Carmel.

From every authentic account of him, we can picture St. Antony as a priest of handsome bearing, burning with the love of God and love of man, fearlessly preaching before the tyrant Ezzelino, going forth to bear the word to Lombardy, Venetia, Romagna and the south of France; we can picture him as executive of acute ability, and as organizer, with exquisite tact and tenderness filling for two

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years the office of Guardian at Le-Puy, for a year that of Custos Provincial in the Province of Limousin, and for three years that of Minister Provincial of Emilia. As theologian, as *Malleus Hereticorum* (Hammer of the Heretics), as professor, as preacher extraordinary, as guardian and provincial, he was pre-eminently a knight minister of the Order, not a knight contemplative. We see in him not, of course, anything approaching the mysterious contradictions presented in the career of his contemporary Brother Elias, nor that Minister General's extraordinary interpretation of our holy Rule; still, there is in St. Antony's story a tendency towards departure from the primitive norm of the Order. He was in truth the first example of the "New Flower," the "Anthos Neon" as the punning chroniclers would have it; for was he not one of the deputation, from the party of the Large Observance, which obtained from the Pope the Bull *Quo Elongati*, interpreting the Rule in a broader sense and (let us say with deep regret) setting aside certain strictures of the Rigorists as contained in the Will of Francis?

If the world, therefore, in its popularizing way, has somewhat divorced St. Antony from the company of Friars Minor, the Saint himself in his lifetime seems not at every moment to fit comfortably into the Umbrian frame. Possibly one can draw on both his Portuguese origin and his years among the

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Canons Regular of St. Augustine to explain any slight departure from the example of the Poverello. This does not infer, however, that he was an imperfect friar, nor that he did not have profoundly at heart the welfare of the Seraphic Order.

And on the other hand, he was not the pretty little man of popular sentiment, with a lily, a loaf of bread and the Divine Child in his arms. He was never soft and sentimental, though, like all great men whose hearts are aflame with sanctifying grace, he was gentle with penitents and tender with sinners and hard only to himself.

The fact is, Antony was both saint and poet,—and neither authentic sanctity nor authentic poetry is built of lilies and sentimentalism. He was progressively a saint, climbing that ladder of thorns and desolation and trials and utter abandon and the sublime foolishness of the Cross. He was progressively a poet, not only in his sonorous medieval Latin poems and Provençal lyrics but also in his eloquent "Gallo-Italic" dialect sermons to the multitudes, sermons replete with poetic parables (which the wonder-loving crowd realistically interpreted as miracles): he was a poet in his eager enthusiasms and what is called "poetic exaggeration"; he was a poet in his thirst for martyrdom that carried him to Africa, in his love for souls that carried him north of the Apennines, in his hunger for holiness that brought his canonization within a year of his death. Only a poet—a Catholic poet—would rush off,



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suddenly, from one Religious Order to another, from one name to another, from one habit to another, from a peaceful cloister to fever-laden Africa, to preach to the Saracens and win a martyr's crown; only a poet—a Franciscan poet—would preach to finny creatures in the sea when heretics turned deaf ears, and only a quiet Franciscan poet, oblivious of his erudition and dignities and honors, would roost in a tree among the leaves of June to be close to God when Death should pass that way.

Fifteenth-century writers, as is the wont of pious hagiologists of all centuries, who are zealous not only to clothe every saint in every virtue at every moment of his existence, but also to give all possible, or impossible, lustre to his genealogy, have asserted that our Antony, or Fernandez (Ferdinand), was the son of Martin Bouillon, descendant of the renowned Godfrey de Bouillon, commander of the First Crusade, and that his mother was Theresa Tavejra, descendant of Froila I, fourth King of Asturia.<sup>1</sup> Maybe so, maybe so, not that it matters; for the alleged scion of Godfrey was soon to shine with greater glory than anyone in that apocryphal lineage. All we know definitely is that his parents were rich and God-fearing nobles, in itself inclined to be an exception to the rule, and that their wealth gave him the rude luxuries of his time and an education at the Lisbon Cathedral school.

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In 1210, at the age of fifteen, Fernandez entered Religion, becoming an Augustinian Canon Regular at the Convent of St. Vincent, just beyond the walls of Lisbon. So devoted was the young novice to learning that, to avoid the distraction of visitors, in two years he removed on permission to the distant motherhouse, the Convent of Santa Croce in C6im-bra, where he was to spend eight quiet years, mainly in study and prayer, cultivating his prodigious memory and, unknown perhaps even to himself, nourishing a fiery eloquence that would in a few years pour over that dry tinder the populace and draw the world—and the Eternal Child—to his heart, draw that Child not in a saccharine embrace but in very bonds of that perfect mystical union which is the ultimate poetry of the soul.

And then, suddenly, something happened in that studious cloister, something happened to the peace of that newly priested Father Ferdinand,<sup>2</sup> something Franciscanly poetic.

Not far from the great Abbey of Sta. Croce at C6imbra was a poor little Franciscan nursery of saints, the Convent of Olivares. Five of its friars paused at Sta. Croce on their way to preach to and be slain by the Saracens. And Fernandez, their Guest-Master, was strangely stirred. Not long afterwards, their mutilated bodies, in gorgeous reliquaries, again paused at the abbey. The soul of the young Augustinian, looking upon these first Franciscan martyrs, was fired to emulation; he cove-

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nanted with the surviving friars of Olivares to join their Order on condition of being sent directly to Morocco.

Worldlings like to imagine a rivalry, almost a polite feud, between the various religious orders of the Church. Then let them consider the magnanimity of the Austin Canons, who not only, though very reluctantly, gave Fernandez permission to quit their ranks and to join the Order of Friars Minor, but even made the abbey church the scene of his clothing with the ashen habit of the Poverello. At the same time he took the new name of Antony, or (as much more frequently written, though much less correctly) Anthony. Subsequently, in his honor, the Convent of Olivares also adopted this name.<sup>3</sup>

Antony's pilgrimage to achieve martyrdom from the Moors was a sublime failure: five months' severe illness in North Africa revealed to him that this was not God's will. Very well, he would resign his own will and mount to heaven through peace, not the sword. And so the re-embarkation for Portugal; and then, as we know, the terrific storm that flung him upon the Sicilian coast, where he lodged with the Friars Minor at Messina. Then the long journey to that cradle of the Order, the Portiuncula at Assisi, where St. Francis, having himself just returned from the Syrian court of Malek-el-Kamil, summoned the Chapter-General of 1221 and discussed the question of free wandering of the friars. The unknown Antony, humbled, of his own initia-

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tive put himself under obedience to Brother Gratian, Minister Provincial of the Romagna, and was sent as chaplain to the little convent of Montepaolo near Forlì.

And at Forlì at an ordination of friars, in the presence of prelates, Friars Preachers and numerous other distinguished guests, the shy and almost unnoticed Antony emerged into the glory of the apostolic life of effluent grace and miracle. Ordered suddenly, and without preparation, to address the assemblage, obedience loosed his tongue and he so transfixed his auditors by his eloquence that his inspiration was acknowledged and thenceforth in every city throughout the north of Italy and southern France his task was to preach to and convert heretics. And there were many such—Cathares and Paterines and Albigenses, especially in the Ghibelline cities. Little wonder that Gregory IX, who canonized him (Pentecost, 30 May, 1232), and who had once heard him preach in Rome and was astounded by his profound learning and especially his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, called him "Ark of the Covenant." Obedience loosed Antony's tongue in rhapsodies of burning rhetoric, full of scriptural and patristic quotations, interpreted allegorically. Years later, when his body was exhumed for translation to "Il Santo," all had fallen to dust save that heaven-blessed tongue. St. Bonaventure, then Minister General of the Order and present at the exhumation, took that holy tongue

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into his hands and, kissing it with devotion, said through his tears, "O blessed tongue, that didst always praise God, and hast been the cause that an infinite number learned to praise Him: now it appears how precious thou art before Him Who framed thee to be employed in so excellent and high a function."

We need not further follow him as he preaches to the multitudes, often as not in the open fields because no church can house the throngs listening to that golden voice and stirred as only Latin peoples can be. We need not go with him where and when, as guardian, as *custos*, or as provincial, he fills administrative offices of the Order. We need not expatiate upon his miracles, for every child knows them. Sufficient to realize that the enthusiasm of a poet-saint never left him, even when, dying of dropsy, he was at Rome released from all official duties in order to preach and, going to Padua, embarked upon the last year of his apostolacy.

In a wood called Campietro, or Field of Peter, near a little convent outside the city, Antony found a great walnut tree with low-spreading branches. Loving the birds and wild creatures almost as much as did St. Francis, he explained his fanciful caprice to the owner of the land and a little cell of mats and brushwood was built high for him in the boughs. Here, despite increasing distemper, his soul knew solace and the poet's creative urge there gave

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us, perhaps, his finest soaring, a Latin hymn to the Mother of God, "*O Gloriosa Domina*," now used for the office of Lauds on Feasts of Our Lady and which is really the continuation or reminiscence of a much earlier hymn ascribed to Fortunatus. Dr. Thomas Walsh<sup>4</sup> thus translates St. Antony's poem:

O glorious Lady of the Light  
Whose rays all other stars eclipse,  
'Twas thine to give thy breast-milk white  
To thy Creator's lips;

What Eve's sad penalties had cost  
Thy fertile womb in full would pay;  
To exiles mid the star-paths lost  
Thy Heavenly Window lights the way.

Thou threshold of the Highest King,—  
Thou Gateway of a noontide flame!  
In her, Life's Virgin heralding,  
O ye, redeemed, acclaim!

Glory, Thou Sovereign Lord, to Thee  
Whom spotless birth to earth did lend,—  
Father and Holy Spirit, Thee—  
Through ages without end!

It was not long, however, that this heaven-singer lived with the other singing birds among the leaves. Feeling that his caprice must be a cause of care to the Brothers who had charge of him, he asked to be taken back to his Paduan convent of St. Mary. But knowing he was close to death, the crowds of

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peasants flocking to kiss his habit were so great and troublesome and, also, all the convents were pleading so eagerly for the honor of becoming the death-bed of a saint, that his litter was borne aside to a house of the Poor Ladies, called l'Arcella, in the suburb of Capo di Monte; and it was there, in June of 1231, just seven centuries ago, he gave a heavenly laugh at the thirteenth superstition: on Friday the Thirteenth he had the glorious "luck" to escape a luckless life into the life of love.

At the very first news of his departure, children ran amuck in Paduan streets, wringing their hands and sobbing, "The Saint is dead!" And a small war broke out between the citizenry of Padua and the villagers of Capo di Monte, a fearful struggle for the honor of possessing his body. A bridge of boats was destroyed, almost was the sacred body of Antony itself torn to pieces in the pious mêlée, before Monsignor the Bishop by a clever ruse dis-trained the recalcitrants and bore the Saint in triumph to St. Mary's. Try to picture New York and Brooklyn in a pitched battle of all their civilians, rioting to possess the dust of a little poor man from Portugal! A little poor man yes, and from another country, yes, yes; but was he not the Ark of the Covenant? And no country, no city, can claim him now, nor even his Friars Minor, wholly. He has become Saint of the Whole World.

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Alban Butler (*Lives of the Saints*, June 13) calls the parents "Martin de Bullones, an officer in the army of Alphonsus I, sur-

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named El Consultador" and "Mary of Tevera, one of the most accomplished of women." *The New Manual of St. Anthony* names them "Martin de Buillon and Mary de Tavera, people of rank." Harold Elsdale Goad (*Franciscan Italy*, p. 155) gives the Saint the semi-Italianized name Fernandez dei Buglioni and says he was born "of noble and wealthy parents."

<sup>2</sup> The date of St. Antony's ordination is still a debated point. Some consider it did not take place until the date of his famous sermon at an ordination at Forlì, later mentioned in this article. If it be argued that a Superior would hardly have insisted that a young man, just priested that morning, should deliver an extempore address to the ordinands, it may be answered that in the thirteenth century he might well have done so. On the other hand, it seems most unlikely that he could have been ten years among the Canons Regular, destined for holy orders, without becoming a priest. The safer inference would be that he was already a priest when he became a Friar Minor. See Father Dominic, O.F.M.: *Franciscan Essays*, art. "St. Antony of Padua," pp. 84, 85, and cf. his citations (Sands & Co., London and Edinburgh; B. Herder, St. Louis, 1924).

<sup>3</sup> Most biographers make the mistake of saying St. Antony adopted his name from that of the convent, and that the convent had been dedicated under the invocation of St. Antony the Hermit. The contrary was true. The Convent of Olivares became the Convent of St. Antony of the Olives *after* our Saint's canonization.

<sup>4</sup> *The Catholic Anthology* (Macmillan), p. 61.



## VIII.

### "*Rex Versuum*"

THERE was in the March of Ancona a certain layman, forgetful of himself and ignorant of God, who had altogether sold himself to vanity.

"He was known as the 'King of Verses' because he was the chief of those who sang of wantonness, and a composer of worldly songs. . . ."

Thus and more wrote Thomas of Celano<sup>1</sup> in 1244-1247, in his *Vita Secunda* (based on his first *Life of St. Francis*, written before 1229, and perhaps on the *Legend by the Three Companions*, if written about 1244), the famous and long unknown biography whose supplement, called the *Tractatus de Miraculis*, lay until 1898 unedited among the manuscripts of the Conventuals at Assisi. And from this source, the second *Life*, as the scholar Tiraboschi discovered, St. Bonaventure derived his material on William of Lisciano, contained in the fourth chapter of his own *Legenda Major*, 1263.<sup>2</sup>

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Very well. And who was this William of Lisciano, or Gulielmo Divini, as Johannes Jørgensen and Maurice Francis Egan, among others, name him?<sup>3</sup> And why should one who sang of wantonness, and who had ridiculed the sublime follies of the Poverello even while captivated by his eloquence, be chronicled by two of the earliest of Franciscan historians? Why should they memorialize one who had altogether sold himself to vanity, and had been court poet to the Emperor Frederick II, and by him had been awarded the crown of laurels which later was to adorn the brows of Petrarch and Tasso? There was the very best of reasons, I assure you.

It was a far cry and a hard road to the peace and sacred joy of the Portiuncula, to the poverty of San Damiano, from the glitter and pomp and artifice of an imperial Court at Palermo. Yet in that Court, indeed in the vanguard of its terrene culture, honored and envied, lived one, proclaimed the greatest poet of his time, who within a few years was to tread that road from glamour to oblivion, from a name on all men's tongues to an alias hiding his fame, from silken hose and doublet to a patched tunic of ashbrown,—one who, greatest miracle of vocation, would exchange his laurel crown, bestowed by an emperor-king who on his behalf had revived the ancient Roman custom, for tonsure and capouch, and thereafter in expiation of artificial renown would conceal his poet's genius either in

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silence or in anonymous canticles; for nothing, not one poem, not one line, indisputably his own has survived from the time of his entrance to Religion.

Silence, yes, or anonymity, probably the latter. Probably Brother Pacifico, the former William of Lisciano, King of Verses, still created poems, poems thereafter a paeon of love to the good God, songs to holy Poverty, hymns in praise, litanies of penitence, some of the galaxy of lovely things, anonymous canticles, so popular in the Middle Ages, so treasured today in the small harvest retained from days of more lavish collections. To think otherwise would be contrary to Seraphic tradition. Our blessed Father St. Francis gave up all things else when he cast off his clothes in the Bishop's palace, and carried stones to rebuild the church, and nursed the leper, and made mystical marriage with Lady Poverty; but he retained on his lips and in his mind the Provençal songs learned at his mother's knee, and the better chansons from France, and the Latin chants of St. Ambrose and his followers; and always to these he was adding songs and poetic prayers of his own. He added to and sang his poems even to his dying hours; always he remained a jongleur of God, a troubadour of divine love. "For what else," asked the Saint, "are the servants of God than His singers, whose duty it is to lift up the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy?"<sup>4</sup> And at his hour of death, St. Francis received her singing—"mortem cantando suscepit," as Thomas of Celano wrote,<sup>5</sup>

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while over the house there was a sudden twittering—the Saint's little friends the larks were saying their last farewell.<sup>6</sup> He could not, then, have banished a poet from his family, nor silenced his tongue, nor stayed his pen. And, as we shall see, it was Pacifico he called upon to make more rhythmical his own best known poem, when St. Francis improvised the *Laudes Creaturarum*.

The royal Court of Sicily was about the worst conceivable kindergarten for a life in Religion. Yet in the years when William of Lisciano was Poet Laureate, comparative peace reigned, nor had the then youthful emperor's lust for power and self-conceit become an obsession. It was not until later years, after his laureate had seen the vision of the cross-pierced Poverello and had fled from Palermo to share that cross, not until then did the real character of Frederick II express itself fully. Then the years of conflict with the Lombards and with the Papacy, even attempting seizure of the Patrimonium of Constantine. Then the torturing of his former chancellor, the poet Pier delle Vigne. Then Frederick's war against God, for which he was twice excommunicated by Gregory IX and reinstated, and once by Innocent IV. Then his deposition. Then his death, in 1250. All this, however, came subsequent to the quieter years when William of Lisciano was the ornament of his gay Court. For in those years prior to 1212 Frederick

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was distinguished from his “barbarian” predecessors by his learning and culture; in later years he exceeded them in barbarity.

This German king and Roman emperor, son of Henry IV and Constance of Sicily, adopted his father’s policy of making Italy the center of his power, and was interested in Germany only because it guaranteed to him his title to Upper and Central Italy. He was chiefly solicitous about Sicily, towards which he was drawn by his maternal parentage. He founded the University of Naples, and, in order to extend a knowledge of ancient philosophy, he had numerous Greek and Arabic manuscripts translated into Latin, and can be said to have been instrumental in introducing Aristotle to the West. He fostered, too, the study of rhetoric, and many members of his Court, notably Pier delle Vigne, were masters of the art. He gathered around him, himself a minor, a band of poets, placing at their head the renowned William of Lisciano, or Gulielmo Divini, a native of Ascoli, and on him he placed the laurel crown of laureateship, as Rex Versuum.

The King of Verses bandied ballads, love-songs, sonnets in contest with Norman and Provençal troubadours; he listened to the dialectics of Greeks and Arabs; he took part in Courts of Love; he wrote much, and some has been preserved and collected by Italian authors—especially noteworthy,

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because it is the earliest extant poem in Italian vernacular, his ode in honor of the Emperor Henry IV. These were the years when he "sold himself to vanity" and was "the chief of those who sang of wantonness." But his time had come, even as, instantly, it came to St. Paul, changing Saul the Persecutor into Paul the Apostle, changing William the King of Verses into Pacificus the Slave of the Divine Poet.

It was the year 1212, and the Poverello had come from Rome whither he had gone to attain the assent of Innocent III to a mission trip through Italy. In Rome he had won two new Brothers—Zacharias, who afterwards became a missionary in Spain, and William, the first Englishman to enter the Order. In Rome, also, the saintly Umbrian had been given the friendship of Giacomina Frangipani, she who was to remain forever the spiritual friend of Friars Minor and Poor Clares. Everywhere, preaching from city to city, St. Francis was surrounded by crowds of jubilant people; at Ascoli thirty men sought reception into the "Religion" (as at this time the friars called the Order). Only the Cathari kept away from him, for the kernel of his preaching—as of all his religious life—was the absolute, unconditional and in all essential things blind obedience to the Roman Church, and the principal consequence thereof, a deep reverence for all priests in communion with Rome. (It is precisely this unquestioning loyalty and orthodoxy of St. Francis

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that has ever been the stumbling block of modern non-Catholic and Rationalist admirers of the Poverello, who have tried so valiantly to make a pre-Reformation Protestant out of one whose belief and acts, whose Holy Rule, whose *Admonitiones*, whose words "On Reverence for the Lord's Body," whose "Testament" never swerved one instant from an intense, even an "Ultramontanist," fealty to Rome.)

And so in time he reached the Marches of Ancona, and came to the market village of San Severino, and there preached in the convent, and crowds pressed forward and stormed the gates for sight or sound of the Little Poor Man who talked on repentance without mincing words but with infinite love for the sinner. Another man, neither little nor poor, had also come to San Severino and to visit that convent, for the King of Verses had a relative there, a nun. From the midst of a dense throng he listened to the humble one, finding himself attentive who had thought to be amused. He watched, who had made sport of the bearded man in tunic patched with sackcloth, and found himself transfixed as by arrows. As for the Saint, he saw him as it were crucified upon two crossed swords and, say some accounts, glorious with the mystic Tau on his forehead, the symbolic headless cross that was later to be the sign or signature of Francis, as on the Blessing to Brother Leo. So the simple and great thing happened, and the King of Verses, the

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darling of an emperor, threw himself at the feet of a mendicant and, himself the beggar, cried out, "Brother! take me away from men and give me to God!" In the grey dawn of the next day<sup>7</sup> the grey-brown habit was girded about him with the cord, and St. Francis gave him the name *Pacificus*, because he saw a true penitent had turned from the world's tumult to the peace of God.

Years have gone by. Brother Pacifico has not in the interim been mute as poet, we can be quite sure. Although there remains no poem of this period whose authorship as his is authenticated, doubtless as has been said his humility, and the possible expiation of a coronation founded solely on secular ability, have caused him to don the shield of namelessness. That he has not ceased to sing is apparent from the fact that he is not merely remembered for past achievement but is even now, in these his later years, regarded as Laureate of the Order, and so regarded by the blessed Francis himself.

Brother Pacifico had served Lady Poverty and her disciples well. In 1217 he was sent to France, where he is said to have become first Provincial Minister of the Order in that country. In the Spring of 1226 he was one of the witnesses of the sacred Stigmata.<sup>8</sup> The last certain date in his life is that of the Bull *Magna sicut*, 12 April, 1227,<sup>9</sup> in which Gregory IX recommends the Poor Clares of Siena to his care. According to Gonzaga, he was sent back to France by Brother Elias, Minister



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General, and there died, probably at Lens, about 1234. But in the hours of most arduous duties the poet in him is recognizable, if only in the dazzling visions with which he was favored. In the village of Bovara, at the hill-foot below Trevi and near Foligno, Brother Pacifico saw the heavens opened and in their midst the throne long vacated by Lucifer, and a Voice told him that this throne was reserved by God for the Poverello of Assisi.

We have now come to the sweetest moments of his life in Religion, the moments doubtless dearest to himself; for now was he to share in some degree with the blessed Francis the poet's joy of creating one of the world's most precious sacred hymns of praise. And as the extant secular poems of William of Lisciano are hardly suitable for quotation here, and as the spiritual poems of Brother Pacifico are shrouded in anonymity or lost in the passing of years only to be recovered in heaven itself, and as, moreover, there will be abundance to record here in the final chapter, that on St. Francis, I am sure our holy Founder—and you, the reader—will not demur that any glory of the Poverello is stinted if in this paper on Pacificus there be included an English version of "the praise of created things which the blessed Francis made to the praise and glory of God when he lay sick at St. Damian's."

The *Laudes Creaturarum*, if not his finest, is certainly the best known of the poems of St. Francis, has been translated innumerable times and with

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varying measure of success and, while usually known as "The Canticle of the Sun," has also been called "The Canticle of Brother Sun,"<sup>10</sup> "Hymn to Creation,"<sup>11</sup> the "Sun Song"<sup>12</sup> "Canticle of the Creatures" and, the literal translation, "The Praises of the Creatures."<sup>13</sup> In a moment you shall hear what the early historians record, showing the not insignificant part assigned to Brother Pacifico in the perfecting of this exquisitely simple yet spiritually profound cry of love and praise, resembling in constantly recurrent lilt the little catches or stornelli, still to be heard any day in Umbrian fields. The text of the poem presents a kind of rhythmical prose which might be written thus:

*"Altissimo, omnipotente, bon Signore:  
Tue son le laude la gloria, lo honore;  
E ogni benedictione. . . .  
Laudato sia mio Signore per suora luna, e per le stelle,  
Il quale in cielo le hai formate chiare e belle. . . ."*

Be it noted that this was not a Pantheistic hymn of praise to the creatures, i.e., the animated elements; it was a hymn of praise *by* the creatures and the author, praises of the creatures for God the Creator. St. Francis who loved humanity and nature so ardently, loved them because of God, not for themselves alone. Let me quote Francis Thompson in this regard, from his essay "Nature's Immortality":<sup>14</sup>

"Absolute Nature lives not in our life, but lives

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in the life of God; and in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the Heart of God."

With this understanding, let us hear what the early historians record:<sup>15</sup>

"In the eighteenth year of his penitence, the servant of God, after a forty nights' vigil, had an ecstasy, after which he ordered Brother Leo to take a pen and write. Then he intoned the Cantic of the Sun and, after he had improvised it, he charged Brother Pacifico, who had been a poet in his worldly life, to fit the words to a more regular rhythm; and he ordered the brothers to learn them by heart, so that they might recite them every day."

Written down verbatim by Brother Leo, the exquisite penman<sup>16</sup> called "il Pecorello" or "little Sheep of God," and then, greater honor, fitted by Brother Pacifico "to a more regular rhythm" without, probably, changing the verbal arrangement more than absolutely necessary to perfect the poem, the words of the cantic are these:

Most High, Omnipotent, good Lord! To Thee  
The praises and the honor and the glory be!  
All blessings, O Most High, befit Thee only,  
And no man is worthy to speak of Thee!

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Be praised, O My Lord, by all Thy creatures!  
And chiefly by Monsignor Brother Sun,  
Whom in the day Thou lightenest for us;  
For fair is he and radiant with resplendence;  
And of Thee, Most High, beareth he the semblance.

Be praised by Sister Moon and Stars of Night;  
In Heaven Thou hast made them, precious, fair and  
bright.

Be praised, O My Lord, by Brother Wind,  
By Air and Cloud and Sky and every Clime,  
By whom Thou givest sustenance unto all kind!

By Sister Water, O My Lord, be praised!  
Useful is she and lowly, precious and chaste.

Be praised, O My Lord, by Brother Fire,  
By whom Thou lightenest our steps at night,  
And fair is he and merry, masterful and of might!

Be praised, O My Lord, by our mother, Sister Earth,  
Who governeth and sustaineth us and giveth birth  
To divers fruits and colored flowers and to herbs!

O bless and praise My Lord and thankful be,  
And serve My Lord with great humility!

And after this, as we learn from the early writers,<sup>17</sup> St. Francis wished straightway that Brother Pacifico, Laureate of the Order, might be given a company of singing friars and go out into the world as the true Minstrels of God. And wherever they found themselves they were to stop and sing the new song of praise, and should ask compensation from their hearers, and the compensation should

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be that they who listened should abide in penitence.

While the blessed Francis was still resting at San Damiano, in a hut of reeds in the convent garden, an ancient quarrel between the Bishop and Municipality burst into flame. Brother Pacifico was sent to summon the magistrates to the Bishop's palace, and there the poet and several other friars sang the *Laudes Creaturarum*, adding this stanza, after which peace was restored:

Be praised, O My Lord, by those who pardon in  
Thy love,  
And injury and tribulation bear!  
Blessed are they who in Thy peace are found,  
For by Thee, O Thou Most High, shall they be crowned!

The last days of the blessed Francis, blind, lame, maimed, racked with fever, were now at hand. And when he saw the Dark Angel drawing close, the Poverello stretched his nail-pierced hands upward in a radiant gesture and cried out, "Then be welcome, Sister Death!" And Brother Pacifico, his heart breaking, "fitted the words to a more regular rhythm," and thus was completed the *Laudes Creaturarum*:

Be praised, My Lord, by my Sister Death, our death of  
the body,  
From whom no man living can flee;  
Woe is for them who die in mortal sin.  
But blessed are those found in Thy most holy Will,  
For to them the second death can work no ill!

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- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Ven. Luke Wadding: *Annales Min.*, ad ann. 1212 and 1225.
- <sup>2</sup> For an important brief study of the traditional sources of Franciscan history and literature, see *Some Pages of Franciscan History*, by Fr. Paschal Robinson, O.F.M. (Catholic Truth Soc., London, 1905).
- <sup>3</sup> Egan: *Everybody's Saint Francis*, p. 170 (Century Co., New York, 1912); Jørgensen: *St. Francis of Assisi—A Biography*, p. 154 (Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1928).
- <sup>4</sup> Words of St. Francis in the *Speculum Perfectionis*.
- <sup>5</sup> Celano: *Vita Sec.*, ii, c. 162.
- <sup>6</sup> Celano: *Trac. de Miraculis*, iv, n. 32.
- <sup>7</sup> It was not until 1220 that a year's trial or novitiate was established in the Order.
- <sup>8</sup> Thos. of Celano: *Vita Secunda*, ii, 99.
- <sup>9</sup> Bull. Franc., i, 33-34; Raynaldus, ad ann. 1227, 64, 65.
- <sup>10</sup> Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C.: *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 421, 3rd edition (Longmans, Green, 1927).
- <sup>11</sup> Luigi Salvatorelli: *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, pp. 293-4 (the hymn trans. by Matthew Arnold); trans. by Eric Sutton (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1928).
- <sup>12</sup> Johannes Jørgensen, *opus cit.*, p. 313.
- <sup>13</sup> Harold Elsdale Goad: *Franciscan Italy*, pp. 128, 116. It is the English version in Goad's book that I use here.
- <sup>14</sup> Francis Thompson: *A Renegade Poet and Other Essays* (Ball Pub. Co., Boston); "Nature's Immortality" is also found in the third volume of Thompson's *Works*, pp. 78 sqq. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., London).
- <sup>15</sup> Wadding: *Annales Ord. Min.*, ad ann. 1224. Bartholomaeus Pisanus: *Liber Conformitatum*, Pt. 2, fol. ii, Milan edition 1510.
- <sup>16</sup> Brother Leo's Breviaries made for SS. Francis and Clare, marvels of delicate workmanship, are still preserved. Bro. Leo was Confessor and secretary to St. Francis.
- <sup>17</sup> *Spec. Perfec.*, caps. 100, 119. *Actus*, c. 21. Celano: *Vita Sec.*, ii, c. 161.

## IX.

### *Flawless Latin Under a Capouch*

**D**ID the world owe him its gratitude for nothing else, we cannot measure what should be the cumulative thanks of poets, of hymnologists, of historians and, even, of all modern religionists, whatever their creed, to an almost forgotten friar of the thirteenth century, for his two colossal gifts to that same world of yesterday and today,—his biographies of St. Francis, without which our knowledge of the perfect imitator of Christ would be almost nil, but on which as foundation all the subsequent legends and *vitæ* have been builded, and, secondly, his perfect sequence, that most sublime hymn of the Middle Ages, *Dies Iræ*.

There is not today a civilized human being, with a modicum of tenderness in his makeup, once he has heard the story, once he has come to know and, knowing, love, the blessed Francis of Assisi, whose life is not made sweeter, nor heart gentler, by even a casual, even a critical reading of the story of the

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little poor man of Umbria. Yet would this sweetening of life have been impossible, for man could have known little of St. Francis, had it not been for one who lived and fasted and sang and suffered and loved with him, one who was more than Boswell to his Johnson, one who was aided by the angels and by Our Lady of the Angels, one who wrote the *Vita Prima* as a solemn pledge under Papal obedience and the *Vita Secunda* under obedience to the Minister-General, one who left such precious eye-witness records that from them as nucleus has developed a library of Franciscana which in its never-to-be-reckoned totality alone would fill a museum.

There is not today any poet or poetry lover, any hymnologist, any antiquarian of Medieval Latin works, any musician touched and influenced by the chant of other day, who, if sincere, is not entranced by the austere solemnity and perfection of the *Dies Iræ*, a poem far greater than the *Stabat Mater* of Jacopone, finer than the *De Contemptu Mundi* of Bernard of Morlaix, surpassing the *Pange Lingua* of St. Thomas and the *Adeste Fideles* of St. Bonaventure, a poem indeed so perfect in the original that it never has been and never can be adequately translated, though nearly a hundred attempts have been printed in the German and about 250 in English. And for both of these creations, the first official biography of St. Francis, which Mr. Montgomery Carmichael well styles "the oldest, purest, the only



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unimpugned source" of Franciscan biography, without which *Vita Prima*, as Father Paschal notes, "Franciscan history is left without foundation," and the great sequence called from its opening words *Dies Iræ*, we are indebted to one man, Brother Thomas of Celano, poet and hagiographical writer and historiographer of the Order of Friars Minor.

Nor does this nearly complete the extent of our debt. For it is now generally accepted that in all probability Thomas of Celano in the late evening of his life was also the author of the *Vita Anonyma* of our blessed Mother St. Clare, written on command of Pope Innocent IV.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, a very convincing argument is set forth by the English translator and editor of Jean Rigauld's *Vita B. Antonii de Ord. Frat. Minorum*,<sup>2</sup> to prove that Celano, hagiographer of the Order, was indubitably author of the first Life or Legend<sup>3</sup> of the Thaumaturgus of Padua. Besides the *Vita Prima* and *Vita Secunda* of St. Francis, Celano wrote the lesser known *Memoriale B. Francisci in Desiderio Animæ*; he wrote two beautiful sequences, choral poems, in honor of the Founder, "*Fregit victor virtualis*" and "*Santitatis nova signa*," and by order of Bl. John of Parma completed his extant contribution to the history of St. Francis by the *Tractatus de Miraculis*, a treatise dealing only with his miracles.

The deplorable effort of a school of modern Free-

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thinkers, led in its infancy by M. Paul Sabatier, striving to discredit the historical value of the writings of Thomas of Celano, has had an ill effect upon Catholic critics and our public generally; for the very name of Celano is little known today, save to scholars, while few writers on Franciscan history make more than passing mention of that nobleman from the Abruzzi famous in his own time for his learning, who joined the Order in 1215 as one of the early disciples of St. Francis. Some popular scribes totally ignore him; one, a Catholic, writing on Medieval Latin poetry, speaks of him merely as author of *Dies Iræ* and as "a friend of St. Francis and one of the earliest of his Minorites; so much is all that is known, even legends about this man being scarce."<sup>4</sup>

If this were true, we should beat our breasts with resounding *mea culpa*, for the fact, if it were a fact, would prove we had let him slip from our hearts and minds, and had thus forgotten our debt to him who in a sense has given us St. Francis, and has given us the immortal sequence for Requiems.

On the contrary, his life is not sealed away by oblivion, the main facts are documented and open to all; if we know not abundantly of his *acta* and *dicta* in detail, that is because he submerged himself while raising others to our vision; he was biographer, not autobiographer; he was sonorous singer of God and portrayer of Judgment, not writer of pretty verses signed by the author for

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his place in posterity's sunlight. That references to him are made chiefly in way of quotation from his writings on St. Francis, rather than in allusions for his own sake, would delight his soul: it were proof that he had sunk his individuality in that of his master, had hidden in the cave of rhetoric that the Order might shine, a seraph, on a high hill without need of *apologia*. There is your true Franciscan.

All that wealth and nobility of birth could bequeath him, were his. Well born, indeed of royal descent, a son of affluence, the town of Celano in the Abruzzi held the family of our friar-poet in sycophant if not snobbish respect. Thomas had every educational advantage (and all his life he remained a student), and a brilliant future in the world was his for the taking. Yet in his youth, scarcely more than his adolescence, he cast everything aside, everything, to follow a little man in patched peasant tunic, a little man who had taken Poverty as his bride, a little man who sang Provençal *chansons* and kissed lepers' hands and found a new way to enter the pierced side of Jesus. Thomas, only a lad of perhaps sixteen, came and saw and was conquered, and in 1215 exchanged patrimony and place for habit and capouch and thrice-knotted cord.

He had given himself utterly, content to be mendicant henceforth, his mental gifts and inherent nobility overlooked, if that were the will of his

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master. But St. Francis was wise in his dove-like simplicity, and had other will than oblivion for this gifted son. In 1221 Brother Thomas accompanied Caesar of Speyer on his mission to Germany, and there he was made *custos* of the convents at Mayence, Worms, Speyer and Cologne; soon after Caesar of Speyer, on returning to Italy, left Brother Thomas in charge as his vicar, potentially if not actually as Provincial in government of the German Province.

Before September of 1223 Celano returned to Italy and during the remainder of the Founder's life lived in familiar friendship close to St. Francis. He was present during the last illness of *Il Poverello*, and from his dying hands obtained his habit ever to be treasured as a relic.

Brother Thomas was present at the General Chapter at Portiuncula, in 1227, and there made the acquaintance of Brother Julian of Speyer, who before entering Religion had been choirmaster at the Court of Louis VIII of France, the father of that great Franciscan Tertiary, St. Louis; a few years after this meeting with Celano, Julian was to write in point of time the second Legend of St. Francis, known by its opening words, *Ad hoc quorundam*.<sup>5</sup> Brother Thomas knew also the friar-poet Master Henry of Pisa, now regarded as author of the *Vita Metrica*, the third in point of time, not point of importance, of the historical biographies of

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our blessed Father. And he was on intimate terms with those beloved early followers, Brothers Leo and Rufino, both of Assisi, and Brother Angelo Tancredi from Rieti, the three whose notes probably had most to do with the compilation of the so-called *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, though they did not give it that title themselves, and a number of collaborators assisted in the work—Brother Philip, the Clares' Visitor, Brother Masseo, Brother Giles (Egidius), Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and Thomas of Celano himself, I think unquestionably; the work was written about 1246, that is to say either just before or shortly after the publication of Celano's *Vita Secunda* (between 1244 and 1247) and may be classed as fifth or sixth in point of time, if as fourth we classify together the various Liturgical Legends divided into the required nine lessons for choral use: these are believed to have been written chiefly by Celano himself and by the Notary Apostolic John of Ceperano and, years later, by St. Bonaventure. Nor must we omit mention of the Legend by "*Anonymus Perusinus*," sometimes ascribed to Brother Leo. If these details weary you, bear with me, reader, though I make this paragraph as brief as possible and only to give a moment's glance at the various biographical studies of St. Francis made during the period between his death (1226) and the death of Thomas of Celano (1255). Subsequent legends, or those written later

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than the *Vita Secunda*—the *Speculum Disciplinæ* now usually ascribed to Bernard of Bessa, St. Bonaventure's secretary, and Bernard's *De Laudibus S. Francisci*, together with St. Bonaventure's magnificent *Legenda Antiqua*, or *Major*, and the still later compilation called *Speculum Perfectionis* (completed 1318), authorship disputed, and finally the anonymous *Actus B. Francisci et Sociorum Ejus*, better known as *Fioretti*, "The Little Flowers of St. Francis,"—all these, except, possibly, the last, are important for any sort of consecutive study of St. Francis as recorded by his first disciples and those who had known the disciples. But, however important these documents may be, and undoubtedly are, their reliability and worth rest in large measure upon the authenticity of the statements, unquestioned by his fellow friars who also had known St. Francis, in the writings of Brother Thomas of Celano, first and official historiographer. As Götz has said, quoted by Jørgensen, "Celano's *Vita Prima* is the fixed point, from which the determination of the value of our sources must begin."

When Gregory IX canonized his friend the Founder of the Friars Minor, which happy triumph occurred 16 July, 1228, the Pope commanded Brother Thomas of Celano to write the Life of the Saint. This work was immediately begun and before the end of 1229 (the Paris Codex says 25 February, 1229, but this early date is doubtful) its author completed and handed to the Pope what we

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now call the *Vita Prima*, sometimes, as Father Cuthbert reminds us,<sup>6</sup> styled *Legenda Gregoriana* in compliment to the Pontiff who ordered it to be written.<sup>7</sup> Any faults in his style are the faults of the time, chiefly what he himself entitles "verbal decorations," *verborum phalleras*, tending to wearisomeness in a continued reading; but in general this first "Life" is the work of a genius. Jørgensen says, "One can turn over the pages of all literature without finding more captivating sketches of men and occurrences than in Celano, and his Latin is carried along by a constantly sustained, gently undulating rhythm."<sup>8</sup> Naturally, that undulating rhythm, since it was the work of a poet.

The *Vita Prima* contained nothing on certain internal difficulties in the Order; it was not intended as a history of the friars, but as a public proclamation, by order of the Pope, of the sanctity of the newly canonized and his claim upon the devotion of the Catholic world at large. The *Vita Secunda*, on the other hand, was written by command of Crescentius the General of the Order, for the Order itself; it was designed specifically for the benefit of the friars.

In writing his legends of St. Francis, St. Clare and St. Antony, Brother Thomas was the painstaking biographer, necessarily tethered to retailing of precise data with little opportunity to make use of his marvelous sense of rhythm and tonal values; but in his poems and liturgical hymns, in his

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"*Fregit victor virtualis*" and "*Sanctitatis nova signa*" and, above all, in that great paradox, his deathless sequence for the Mass of the Dead, the *Dies Iræ* in imagination and music and creative instinct and wonderful mastery over words and accents, he is the poet freed to pour out his soul—and awe all poets forever in the pouring.

Some Dominicans at one time, centuries ago, disputed his authorship, but long since they and nearly all others have withdrawn their objections. Even the most cautious will today say, simply, that he is "probably" the author. As true author he is accepted by Daniel, Mohnike, Jörgensen, Fink, Lisco, Father Britt, Father Cuthbert, Father Paschal, Father Leopold de Chérancé, Trench, Duffield, Saintsbury, Rambach, Julian and others who have written especially on the subject, both Catholic and Protestant savants. In this connection one might consult with profit not only our *Catholic Encyclopedia* but also, as entirely disinterested, the Rev. John Julian's article of six double-column pages in his *Dictionary of Hymnology*. Mr. Julian's summing up is, that "Taking all the arguments and ascertained facts into account, we may conclude that the *Dies Iræ* was written by Thomas of Celano, a Franciscan friar of the thirteenth century and the friend and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi."<sup>9</sup>

While there is no record of the authorship or origin of the ecclesiastical melody, we know that it



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is about as old as the sequence itself, and some writers, e.g. the author of a brief monograph in *The New Catholic Dictionary*, suggest that the melody "was probably either written by Thomas of Celano himself, or else adapted to his hymn as soon as the latter was finished." Of course this is purely an interesting guess. Among notable modern composers who have set the sequence to music, were Colonna, Bassani, Mozart, Cherubini, Berlioz, Verdi, Bruneau and Gounod.

If the austere melody haunts us, the perfection of the Latin wording is simply unapproachable. No version in the vernacular has ever been adequate, none among nearly 350 attempts has ever become widely known. The translation given below, a composite, a cento, as published in Father Matthew Britt's *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*,<sup>10</sup> is the work of two hymnologists, stanzas 1-5, 10, 14, 17, 18, by W. F. Wingfield, the remainder by Father J. A. Aylward, O.P. There are four translations in Mr. Orby Shipley's *Annus Sanctus*; one of Dr. Abraham Coles' is given in Dr. Walsh's *The Catholic Anthology*. Dr. Coles, a Newark physician, who made eighteen translations, maintains that no single version can reflect the totality of the original—that it is impossible "to preserve, in connection with the utmost fidelity and strictness of rendering, all the rhythmic merits of the Latin original,—to attain to a vital likeness as well as to an exact literalness, at the same time that nothing

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is sacrificed of its musical sonorousness and billowy grandeur, easy and graceful in its swing as the ocean on its bed—to make the verbal copy, otherwise cold and dead, glow with the fire of lyric passion.”<sup>11</sup> The untranslatableness of the original is acknowledged by the Rev. Dr. Duffield, whose sixth version, in his opinion, did not carry him “one inch” beyond the first. The German philosopher Fichte tried to make a translation; Mozart put the sequence into his Requiem; Goethe used it with telling effect in his *Faust*; Sir Walter Scott gives with a condensed adaptation a grand climax to Canto VI of his *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

It is quite astonishing, writes Professor Saintsbury, “to reflect upon the careful art or felicitous accident of such a line as

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum,*

with the thud of the trochee falling in each instant on a different vowel; and still more on the continuous sequence of five stanzas, from *Judex ergo* to *non sit cassus* in which a word could not be displaced or replaced by another without loss. The climax of verbal harmony corresponding to and expressing religious passion and religious awe, is reached in the last,

*Quaerens me sedisti lassus,  
Redemisti crucem passus:  
Tantus labor non sit cassus!—*

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where the sudden change from the dominant *e* sound (except in the rhyme foot) of the first two lines to the *a*'s of the last is simply miraculous, and miraculously assisted by what may be called the internal sub-rhyme of *sedisti* and *redemisti*. This latter effect can rarely be attempted without a jingle: there is no jingle here, only an ineffable melody. After the *Dies Iræ* no poet could say that any effect of poetry was, as far as sound goes, unattainable; though few could have hoped to equal it, and perhaps no one except Dante and Shakespeare has fully done so."<sup>12</sup>

According to Dr. Duffield, the *Dies Iræ* "gives us a new conception of the powers of the Latin tongue. Its wonderful wedding of sound and sense—the *u* assonance in the second stanza, the *o* assonance in the third, the *a* and *i* assonance in the fourth, for instance—the sense of organ music that runs through the hymn, even unaccompanied, as distinctly as through the opening verses of Lowell's *Vision of Sir Launfal* and the transitions as clearly marked in sound as in meaning from lofty adoration to pathetic entreaty, impart a grandeur and dignity to the *Dies Iræ* which are unique in this kind of writing."<sup>13</sup>

After all this praise, any translation, even one with merit, must seem an anticlimax. Forewarned that a perfect English version is impossible, here is the joint rendering by Mr. Wingfield and Father

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Aylward, which should be compared line for line with the Latin original as found in our *Roman Missal*:

That day of wrath, that dreadful day,  
When heaven and earth shall pass away,  
Both David and the Sibyl say.

What terror then shall us befall,  
When lo, the Judge's steps appall,  
About to sift the deeds of all.

The mighty trumpet's marvelous tone  
Shall pierce through each sepulchral stone  
And summon all before the throne.

Now Death and Nature in amaze  
Behold the Lord His creatures raise,  
To meet the Judge's awful gaze.

The books are opened, that the dead  
May have their doom from what is read,  
The record of our conscience dread.

The Lord of judgment sits Him down,  
And every secret thing makes known;  
No crime escapes His vengeful frown.

Ah, how shall I that day endure?  
What patron's friendly voice secure,  
When scarce the just themselves are sure?

O King of dreadful majesty,  
Who grantest grace and mercy free,  
Grant mercy now and grace to me.

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Good Lord, 'twas for my sinful sake,  
That Thou our suffering flesh didst take;  
Then do not now my soul forsake.

In weariness Thy sheep was sought;  
Upon the Cross His life was bought;  
Alas, if all in vain were wrought.

O just avenging Judge, I pray,  
For pity take my sins away,  
Before the great accounting-day.

I groan beneath the guilt, which Thou  
Canst read upon my blushing brow;  
But spare, O God, Thy suppliant now.

Thou who didst Mary's sins unbind,  
And mercy for the robber find,  
Dost fill with hope my anxious mind.

My feeble prayers can make no claim,  
Yet, gracious Lord, for Thy great Name,  
Redeem me from the quenchless flame.

At Thy right hand, give me a place  
Among Thy sheep, a child of grace,  
Far from the goats' accursed race.

Yea, when Thy justly kindled ire  
Shall sinners hurl to endless fire,  
Oh, call me to Thy chosen choir.

In suppliant prayer I prostrate bend,  
My contrite heart like ashes rend,  
Regard, O Lord, my latter end.

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Oh, on that day, that tearful day,  
When man to judgment wakes from clay,  
Be Thou the trembling sinner's stay,

And spare him, God, we humbly pray.  
Yea, grant to all, O Savior Blest,  
Who die in Thee, the Saints' sweet rest.

Let critics who will say what they like against the "*illiterati*" among mendicant friars, here was a deathless music, here a matchless poetry, here an untranslatable perfection, a flawless Latin flooding forth from under a capouch.

<sup>1</sup> See Father Paschal: *Life of St. Clare*, Introduction, pp. xxii sqq.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life of St. Antony of Padua*, by Jean Rigauld, Friar Minor and Bishop of Tréguier, trans. by an English Franciscan; Introduction, pp. 12-15 (Cath. Truth Soc., London, 1904).

<sup>3</sup> The word Legend is used in this connection in its original sense, not in the modern corrupt meaning of folk-tale or popular tradition. *Legenda*, as Father Paschal points out (*Some Pages of Franciscan History*, pp. 8, 9), "literally means that which is to be read, and from the fact that in monasteries and convents the reading at meals was usually taken from the lives of the Saints, the word legend obtained the meaning of biographical narrative of some servant of God."

<sup>4</sup> Miss J. M. Danforth, in *The Catholic World*, July, 1931, p. 457.

<sup>5</sup> Julian of Speyer's Legend was written between 1230 and 1232. This is ascertained by the fact that he describes the translation of St. Francis' body to the Church of St. Francis, 1230, but does not mention Brother Elias of Cortona as General—which he became in 1232. The Legend is found in *Analecta Bolland.*, XXI (1902), pp. 160-202.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, by Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., Appendix IV, ii, p. 500 (Longmans, Green & Co., 1927).

<sup>7</sup> Published by the Bollandists, *Acta SS. die 4 Octobris* (1768). The *Vita Prima* and *Vita Secunda* were published by Rinaldi in 1806; in 1880 Amōni republished Rinaldi's edition. A definitive edition of both legends was published by P. Edouard d'Alençon in 1906 (Desclée); Père Edouard also brought out an edition of most of Celano's other writings.

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<sup>8</sup> Johannes Jørgensen: *St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 353; trans. from the Danish by T. O'Connor Sloane (Longmans, Green & Co., 1928).

<sup>9</sup> *Dictionary of Hymnology*, p. 296 (Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1892).

<sup>10</sup> Benziger Bros., 1924; see pp. 202-215.

<sup>11</sup> *Dies Iræ in Thirteen Original Versions*, p. 33; quoted by Father Matthew Britt, O.S.B.: *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*.

<sup>12</sup> *Flourishing of Romance*, p. 9; quoted by Matt. Britt, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Latin Hymns*, p. 249; quoted by Matt. Britt, *op. cit.*

## X.

### *"Homo Novus"*

TO PUSH a lesser talent into the place of a greater, or at least a less apparent into the stead of a recognized, a less obvious into the position of a prominent, has been the nervous ambition of many writers, or, looking back over the accomplishment of years, partial failure to pursue their quest has been their secret regret. Stephen Leacock was a past master and professor of political economy in Canada, yet the desire that gnawed him like a canker was that he might be remembered as a humorist. Samuel Clemens, on the contrary, was chained by his reading public to the rôle of Mark Twain, to the purveyor of Tom Sawyers and Huck Finns and Innocents Abroad, while all the while, a rough and somewhat vulgar humorist, he yearned to be accepted as a serious writer and bequeathed his book on St. Jeanne d'Arc to the world as his bid for immortality. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, after creating an omniscient thaumaturgus called Sher-



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lock Holmes, cast aside his great detective in order to photograph fairies and write the theology of spooks. Thomas Hardy, in the ultimate analysis, will perhaps be remembered as a great poet who wrote novels in his youth. Willa Cather will be remembered as a great novelist whose writing career was launched with a book of poems.<sup>1</sup> Force of circumstance, or the road of least resistance, may be the motive swerving a writer to a *métier* alien to his normal fittedness—Samuel Johnson writing *Rasselas* to pay his mother's funeral expenses, the sensational Arthur Rimbaud suddenly deserting poetry to bury himself in Africa; fine poets of our day turning poor novelists for greater emolument, capable novelists turning mediocre poets for greater ambitions.<sup>2</sup>

All through his youth, perhaps even to these present hours of his life's evening (for he is still, happily, with us at this time of writing), the Danish writer Johannes Jørgensen dreamed of himself, thought of himself, wrote and spoke of himself as a poet. No one will deny him that exalted office, and it is as poet we are to consider him here; yet, authentic though his claim be to the laurel, is it not true that, certainly to the English and American readers of those of his books which have appeared in translation, he is regarded first and foremost as an exquisite and scholarly prose writer, specifically as biographer and autobiographer? It may be our misfortune to have so few of his poems

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in our language that we must perforce think of him and estimate his place rather in the field of prose. Certainly by the average small reader in our country, and by that bane of the bibliophile the average public librarian in our cities, any mention of Jørgensen today will yield the inquirer one of two titles out of a half hundred books by the Danish savant: you will either be told he wrote a two-volume autobiography, or you will hear—"Jørgensen? Jørgensen? Oh, yes, that Swede or Dane or Norwegian or something, who wrote a highbrow book about Francis of Assisi." And this was the gentle student who made poetry his life-love, who would that he be remembered, if at all, as poet!

Yet if this be the situation in America, I think a certain Tertiary of St. Francis, now gathering like a cloak many winters around his shoulders, must at least smile humbly-proudly and happily in the Capuchin cell at Assisi where, a never-too-frequent visitor, he spends so much time in these his declining years. Poets are not to be measured by their appeal to the too close perspective of contemporaries; they can afford, if they are true poets, to await the verdict of time, as Emily Dickinson waited, as Father Gerard Hopkins waited. And after the waiting, then the "Homo Novus," the New Man among poets,—"Homo Novus" as little Johannes was once styled, although then in derision, by his

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new schoolfellows at a grammar school in Copenhagen: " 'I am glad I don't look so idiotic as Homo Novus!' And 'Homo Novus,' the new man, winced at the smarting taunt." <sup>3</sup> In the meantime Jørgensen can rest alone upon the world's just acclaim of his superb work on St. Francis—and of all his studies and writings, surely nothing could please him more than the knowledge that *this* work should hold first place in the hearts of average readers, in the memories of average librarians.

Along with his ardor for excellence in poetics, three features stand out from his life story with ever-increasing accent, three great thirsts, one might say: his inherent pursuit of a cultural knowledge, that resulted all along the journey in a deep reading and deep thinking; a struggle to build up a personal system of philosophy, that brought him into contact with such diverse, and sometimes heterodox, thinkers and writers as Georg Brandes, Ibsen, Tolstoi, Nietzsche, Strindberg, Stuckenberg, Renan, Taine, Björnson, Verlaine, Baudelaire; third and chief, his nostalgia for security of soul and union with the Divine will that carried him from Danish Lutheranism to Pantheism, to skepticism and other even less comfortable isms, at last into the harbor of Faith in the bark of Peter and thence to the shrine of St. Francis. And throughout and with these three great thirsts, mental, social, spiritual, there was ever as a singing accompaniment that

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dæmon the muse of poetry, that comforting and at the same time driving urge which gives no real poet an hour's utter serenity but keeps ever prodding him to creating substance out of the music in his soul.

There is but one pain a poet knows greater than that when he is in the throes of composition, and this greater pain is his agony when *not* composing, the dark mute moments when his vision and nerves and hearing, terribly alert, yet remain passive though straining to be not only receptive and receiving but giving.

The poet, even the unspiritual, the world-obsessed, the self-deceiving poet, is to some extent the only living being with a certain affinity to the saint, startling though this statement may appear on its casual reading. Both are driven, even more than they are driving themselves, to quests beyond the questing, beyond the aspiration, of other beings, to realms of thought denied the student, the scientist, the philosopher—unless these, too, view the temporal scene with eyes either of a saint or a poet. Poets and saints have a deeper sense of values, have greater perspective, have an intuitive insight rare indeed among other beings. Poets and saints feel what they feel, whether utter animalism, in the completely sensuous poet or whether utter abandon in the completely spiritual saint, to a much greater degree—if there can be degrees beyond the *utter!*—than does any other being. Poets and

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saints, again, are allied in the place they hold in the opinion of mankind: more often than not each is adjudged to have most of the earmarks of mental aberration if not insanity; poets and saints are either lionized and sentimentalized, or are shunned and despised as being different, as unnatural, as in some mysterious way linked with diabolism! When a poet is at the same time a recognized saint, or when a saint is admittedly a poet, then, of course, his offense is infinitely worse! Or his chance to escape being lionized is infinitely slimmer!

As is so often the case with unguided youth, the verses of young Johannes were one wail of desolation and despondency—and St. Francis, Jørgensen later discovered, did not err in calling despondency "the Babylonian disease." From his boyhood days in Svendborg, in the 1860s and '70s, to his grammar school days in Copenhagen, and then in the University, he looked for happiness outside himself. Bitterly he pictures his future, evoking however an unselfconscious humor:

When on wakeful nights  
I look down the streets of life,  
I see everywhere the dust of books; and I rummage in  
it till  
I sneeze, and a crowd about me,  
My fellow-comrades in this toil, turn round upon me  
And say, "God bless you!"

The others are happy in their narrow world. Like,

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he says, the dry *famulus* of Doctor Faust, they wish for nothing. It is only the poet who sees that

Outside the little window  
the light leaves whisper softly;  
across the skies the clouds are scudding,  
the swallows speeding after them.

In the lime-tree a nightingale  
warbles, so that my withered heart  
in anguish and in longing swells  
and the pallid flowers fall.

The air is fragrant, full of music,  
Over the meadows the moon is dreaming  
and the white mists are dancing . . .

Ah! but I alone have seen it;  
and again I bend my back  
like my fellow workers,  
diligent and learned men.

It was a gala day for the youth when, in 1887, his first book appeared and was praised by Edward Brandes (who generously likened Jørgensen to Mallarmé), praised by Viggo Stuckenberg, praised by Sophus Claussen, and its author received encouragement from the great Georg Brandes; and that first book was a volume appropriately labeled *Verses*, for the eighty pages of melancholy could not rightly claim to be poetry. That would come later, when a larger vision unfolded, when real

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sorrows showed him the futility of squandering emotions upon griefs of imagination, when the soul learned to breathe, when folly had run its course through the Students' Society of practical libertinism and something close to atheism and anarchy. Yet that he was even then capable of virile lines with poetic value, is evident from his "Dædalus":

All the long and weary day  
The hammer of toil I swing,  
Gold I beat for King Minos' crown  
And gold for his armlet and ring.

I hammer his sword, his shield I mend,  
His knives I have to whet;  
And as I toil, a-dreaming I fall,  
Of beating my own gold yet.

The dream was fair, but has faded long since,  
Of an anvil that should be mine,  
Whereon I might forge the gold of my heart,  
In a form of my own design.

Yet short is the space of that dream for me,  
The tools again I hold,  
A hilt I make for King Minos' new sword,  
And sharpen the edge of the old.

But when at length the day is done,  
Not another stroke will I beat;  
Out in the soft and sheltering night  
I haste to my lonely retreat.

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There all night long my light I burn,  
Till the voice of the city sings,  
There, King Minos, I labor on,  
And for flight I fashion my wings!

Always his pen tried to measure the gain in his mental and philosophical growth, in his spiritual development. Prior to his conversion—after years of struggle and soul-searching and study, he was received 16 February, 1896—possibly eleven of his books had been published: *Verses, Legends of Spring* (prose), *A Stranger* ("which was meant to be a Bible of anarchy"), *Summer, Moods* (poems and reprints of newspaper articles), *The Tree of Life* ("a philosophical novel about the will and its conversion in the Schopenhauerian sense"), *Homesickness* (a story), *Bekendelse* (a collection of poems), *German Days, Truth and Falsehood of Life*, and the first part, his travels in Germany, in 1894, of *Le Livre de la Route* (the second part, *An Umbrian Chronicle*, was occupied with his first visit to what became his great love, Italy, and especially Umbria, and most particularly Assisi).

"Now, surely," he writes in his autobiography,<sup>4</sup> "I ought to be happy? Married [1891] and with a pleasant home of my own and a child besides; books on my shelves, photogravures on the walls from Burne-Jones' Rossetti,—in fact, everything that was typical of a young literary home. I had friends, I was the associate of men of talent, many of them famous."



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But he was not happy, and he knew why. A free rendering from Heine answered him: "You have put out the lights of heaven and wonder that we are men of darkness." A radical, intellectual anarchist, rationalist yet profoundly studying, he was unhappy not because he was a poet but because he was called to be of the Communion of Saints and had no words adequately to reply to that Voice; he was restless not because he was a poet but because he was pursued by that same Hound of Heaven the Divine love of Whom was apostrophized by Francis Thompson. And in time the Voice was answered and pursuit was ended, and out of the misery of the skeptic was born and reborn Johannes the Homo Novus.

That first visit to his Promised Land, Assisi, the three months spent there and at La Rocca with the young Jewish convert Mogens Francesco Ballin, the painter, and with Padre Felice the gentle Capuchin, form one of the loveliest sections of the first volume of Jørgensen's autobiography. He was not yet in the Church, he still suffered "a series of revolts of the soul," still pursued by that supernatural force, "*gratia*, the terrible *charitas*, which is not satisfied until it has driven out all other love from the soul and burns alone in the heart which its fires have purified." But he was happier than he had ever been before, and Italy gave him new vision and joy. "I acquired those famous Catholic kneeling-knees, owing to which a devout Catholic can

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never be quite well-dressed, with that perpendicular, unbroken trouser-line, which is the pride and outward sign of a modern man's good breeding," he writes in one of his rare moments of spontaneous levity, and adds that we pilgrims and Catholics "have to put up with this, as with so many other inferiorities"!

He had made a long journey—not the trip through Germany, not the pilgrimage to Umbria, not the visits to the Benedictine abbey at Beuron on invitation of the Dutch painter-monk Jan Verkade<sup>5</sup>—no, but the thirty-year quest from the day of his birth; and now, in 1896, in the Church of the Sacred Heart at Stenosgade, in all humility he came home. It was a far cry from those boyhood nights when he would say the Paternoster "in the good old Lutheran manner, that is, lying on my back in bed."

But a foothold on the rock is only a foundation for the ladder of the saints, and there was still much warfare for our poet, inasmuch as the devil always strives harder to gain those in the vanguard—the indifferents will fall without his striving. And although Jørgensen in his humility could write, "He who is minted like a penny will never become a crown piece, and I was not minted to be a superman—only to be a Christian," he was not satisfied—nor is any one of us in our secret soul—with anything less than perfection. Both poet and saint demand perfection in themselves. Neither is

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content to remain static: always one must become a Homo Novus.

He did a great deal of work during those first years of his Catholic life. In 1896 there was published his study of the Benedictine art center, *Beuron*, also completion of *The Truth and Falsehood of Life*; in 1897 came *Foes of Hell* and *The Last Day*; 1898 saw the publication of *Parables* and a collection of poems. The close of the century gave us *Conversion*, "a series of lightly sketched portraits of converts, from Paul and Augustine to Brentano and Huysmans"; there was also the book *Mosaics*, impressions of his first visit to Rome, and *Our Lady of Denmark*, a novel of Christian democracy, likewise written in Rome, besides his translation of Sven Hedin's *Through Asia* and his editorship of *The Catholic*.

But his chief milestone of 1899 was something more important than the writing of books or the breathing of poetry; it was his union for life with the Seraphic Family. His friend Mogens Ballin had married, and in his bride's parents' chapel, in Copenhagen, Jørgensen's beloved Capuchin Padre Felice gave the poet the habit and cord of a Tertiary. "In the private chapel at 'Mariabo' he received my wife and myself into the Third Order of Saint Francis and on leaving Denmark on Ash Wednesday he pledged us to meet him again in Assisi." <sup>6</sup>

The indefatigable pen continued, at short intervals, to produce book after book, erudite yet ten-

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derly human, profound yet never pedantic, until Denmark's son became known the world over—yes, even to American librarians. I have not at hand a Jørgensen bibliography; the following titles are gathered from casual references in the poet's autobiography and this is, of course, not the complete list: *Book about Rome* (two volumes, 1900), *Legend from old Siena*, *Father Damien*, *Eva*, *The Sacred Fire*, *Little Flowers of Saint Francis* (translation into Danish, introduction by Björnson, 1902), *Pictures of Roman Saints*, *The Pilgrim Book*, *Grass*, *From Vesuvius to the Skaw*. This brings us to 1906 when, after years of research and close study in the Vatican Library, on Umbrian pilgrimages and in correspondence, the savant produced his undoubted masterpiece, his almost incomparable book on St. Francis, the actual writing of which, begun in Denmark, was finished at Frauenberg, in the Franciscan monastery above Fulda. He tells us he wrote this biography of the Umbrian apostle "as a thanksgiving for all that the great saint had done to me" and in order to pay "my debt to Assisi." But if he paid his debt, all the world is still indebted to him for a work scholarly yet popular and unquestionable in practically every detail (save, perhaps, for occasional yielding to Sabatier's school in unproven theorems). Jørgensen's *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Biography* is surely the outstanding work on our founder by a layman and one of the half dozen

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supreme studies of the saint in the past hundred years or more.<sup>7</sup>

This was followed by *Pilgrim Walks in Franciscan Italy* (London, 1908), *Danische Literaturgeschichte*, *Lourdes*, *From the Depths* (his collected poems, 1908), *The Story of a Hidden Life*, *The Lord of the World* (translation of Msgr. Benson's book of that title), *Moods and Impressions*, *Saint Catherine of Siena*, *In Outermost Belgium* (1915), *Fruit of the Olive Tree*, *Beyond All the Blue Mountains*.

In each of his books—even in their titles—there is poetry. Indeed I am perhaps of the minority which would feel the pulse of Jørgensen's poetry in his prose rather than in his intentionally metrical lines and poem forms. This, however, is not to belittle him among Denmark's stellar poets, where he deservedly will hold a place. His poetic formula suffers, no doubt, in translation, whereas the prose diction is if anything enhanced. Take but a few selections at random, from but one among his books, his autobiography. Listen to this:

And one morning in pouring rain I stand before Elisabethenkirche. The church in all its slender beauty rears up its reddish walls and grey towers under a veil of running rain and of purling water from the dragons' heads (like silver threads in a veil).

Hear this music in minor key:

The laughter of the young girls rang clear for a short

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while yet in the calm evening air, then they were called inside. The bats began their noiseless circling, black against the light air. Then came the first trills of the nightingale and behind the somber trees the silver bright Rhine glided slowly past.

Look at this picture:

Onward through Val d'Arno. At eight o'clock we were at Rignano sull' Arno. The river valley was still filled with the fog of the harvest morning—into the mist curved the tall, narrow bridge which I remembered so well—small donkey vehicles were rolling over it—bells were ringing for Mass.<sup>8</sup>

And this:

Sunshine and wind. The fields as though newly washed in light.<sup>9</sup>

The martial music here:

Leo XIII allowed the Marseillaise to resound like the beat of eagles' wings over the clipped hedges in the gardens of the Vatican.

And the exquisite melody here:

All at once, far away in the great forest, a breath of wind, like the breath of night, a heavy, heaving sigh, arose, and passing underneath the grey sky, swept over the thousands and thousands of naked tree-tops; it grew stronger and more distinct as it drew nearer, at length it reached us and shook the trees over our heads, to fall away again and grow fainter and fainter, at last dying away far off in the deserted forest.

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See this picture:

Roofs among the foliage—behind them a row of dome-shaped trees. Furthest away broad, smooth walls of forest, as remote as one's longings.

Finally, in a burst of glorious music, this description of the pealing of the noon Angelus over Assisi:

A single frail little bell was the first to begin, far too soon, like a schoolchild eager to show what he can do. Not for long, though, was it allowed to ring alone; one by one they all joined in, all the silver bells of Assisi, all the golden bells of Assisi, all the booming and clanging doom-day bells of Assisi, all the joyous, bright, happy, exulting and blissful heavenly bells of Assisi . . . From the extreme north to the farthest south of Assisi the sound runs like a fire in grass; everywhere the clear tones soar like bright flames in the air. Santa Chiara rings out below Pincio. San Francesco answers from far away in the Colle del Inferno. San Pietro and Santa Maria del Vescovado peal long and exultingly, San Rufino rings deeply and soberly. Santa Maria sopra Minerva, San Quirico, Sant' Apollinare, Chiesa Nuova, Francescuccio, the church of the Capuchins, the chapel of the Colettines, the convent of the German nuns, Sant' Andrea, Santa Margherita—all the high towers and all the small belfries, in which one sees the bells swinging in and out, all of them ring, all of them chime, all of them rejoice, all of them play before the Lord and praise His Holy Mother: Ave Maria, gratia plena. "Hail, Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus!"

In these later evenings of his life, nearly all of

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which he spends with his Capuchins at Assisi, a beloved poet hears those bells and they are songs of peace. He is not resting however on his laurels. Still actively writing and studying, and always now in the Franciscan spirit, Johannes Jørgensen keeps his pen moist and his wit dry, and smiles out from the Collegio di S. Lorenzo da Brindisi, from where but a short while ago he wrote to *The Commonwealth* on recent Franciscan—and more particularly Capuchin—research work in history and literature, and of the launching of a new quarterly, *Collectanea Franciscana*.<sup>10</sup>

A Franciscan to his fingertips, a poet in every fiber of his being: surely among living writers no one has better claim to a place in this series than the little Danish Lutheran boy of long ago, who was once derisively called, what he has continued to be in actuality with each revolution of the wheel of life, a Homo Novus.

<sup>1</sup> *April Twilights*, poems by Willa Cather (Richard G. Badger, Boston, 1903); see art. by Francis Talbot, S.J., in *America*, 22 Aug., 1931. "But," says a writer in the *Sat. Rev. of Literature*, same date, "throughout all of Miss Cather's work there is a lyrical quality which at times rises to genuine poetry."

<sup>2</sup> See Edgell Rickword's *Rimbaud: the Boy and the Poet* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1924).

<sup>3</sup> *Jørgensen: An Autobiography*, vol. i., p. 42; trans. by Ingeborg Lund from the Danish (Longmans, Green & Co., 1929).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. i., p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> John, or Jan, Verkade, the Dutch painter and son of a Menonite family, became a Catholic and then a Benedictine priest and one of the leading lights of the great religious art center at Beuron: see his fascinating book, *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk*, by Dom Willibrord Verkade, O.S.B. (P. J. Kenedy & Sons, New York, 1930).

<sup>6</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. ii., p. 93.



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<sup>7</sup> *Den hellige Frans of Assisi*, Copenhagen, 1907; *St. François d'Assise*, 53rd French edition, Perrin et Cie., Paris, 1920; *St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography*, trans. by T. O'Connor Sloane, new impression, Longmans, Green & Co., New York, London, Toronto, 1928; numerous other translations and editions.

<sup>8</sup> *Autobiography*, ii., 234.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 233.

<sup>10</sup> *The Commonweal*, issue of 6 May, 1931.

## XI.

### "*The Seraphic Doctor*"

"*LET* us leave a saint to work for a saint," whispered the great Aquinas, tiptoeing away. He had come to visit Bonaventure at his cell in Paris while the latter was writing his life of St. Francis, and he found him in an ecstasy. And that is the whole story of the Seraphic Doctor: in all he did and said, in all he wrote,—in all his theological and philosophical treatises, in his exegetical and homiletic works, in his mystical writings, in his expositions of the religious life, in his letters and admonitions, in his *Legenda Major* of St. Francis, as it came to be called, and in the choir abridgement known as the *Legenda Minor*, in his poems and hymns and sequences,—there was the always perfect blending of tender piety and profound learning, the work of a saint. And this saint's work was, after the accidental glory of God, all for preservation of the ideals of St. Francis and their application to the soul of man. His friend, the Angelic Doctor, spoke

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truly when he said of the Seraphic Doctor, that a saint was working for a saint.

There was never any pious rivalry between Scholasticism's two greatest theologians, one of the Friars Preachers and the other of the Friars Minor, between, for instance, the *Summa* of St. Thomas and the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *Breviloquium* of St. Bonaventure. Nor should moderns ever be guilty of disparaging one in upholding the other. Father Paschal's monograph in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*<sup>1</sup> can be briefly quoted in this regard, and any thought of comparison can thereafter be laid aside. "Bonaventure," writes the Archbishop, "was the true heir and follower of Alexander of Hales and the continuator of the old Franciscan school founded by the *Doctor Irrefragabilis*, but he surpassed the latter in acumen, fertility of imagination, and originality of expression. His proper place is beside his friend St. Thomas, as they are the two greatest theologians of Scholasticism. If it be true that the system of St. Thomas is more finished than that of Bonaventure, it should be borne in mind that, whereas Thomas was free to give himself to study to the end of his days, Bonaventure had not yet received the Doctor's degree when he was called to govern his Order and overwhelmed with multifarious cares in consequence. The heavy responsibilities which he bore till within a few weeks of his death were almost incompatible with further study and even precluded his completing what he had

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begun before his thirty-sixth year. Again, in attempting to make a comparison between Bonaventure and St. Thomas, we should remember that the two saints were of a different bent of mind; each had qualities in which he excelled: one was in a sense the complement of the other; one supplied what the other lacked. Thus Thomas was analytical, Bonaventure synthetical; Thomas was the Christian Aristotle, Bonaventure the true disciple of Augustine; Thomas was the teacher of the schools, Bonaventure of practical life; Thomas enlightened the mind, Bonaventure inflamed the heart; Thomas extended the Kingdom of God by the love of theology, Bonaventure by the theology of love. Even those who hold that Bonaventure does not reach the level of St. Thomas in the sphere of Scholastic speculation concede that as a mystic he far surpasses the Angelic Doctor. In this particular realm of theology, Bonaventure equals, if he does not excel, St. Bernard himself. Leo XIII rightly calls Bonaventure the Prince of Mystics: 'Having scaled the difficult heights of speculation in a most notable manner, he treated of mystical theology with such perfection that in the common opinion of the learned he is *facile princeps* in that field' (Allocutio of II October, 1890)."

Let us remember, moreover, that the personal friendship of these brilliant sons of the Castilian and the Umbrian was a true communion of saints. In their own persons they carried on the tradition

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of the holy founders, that is, that these two groups of mendicants, Dominicans and Franciscans, were always to be devoted kinsmen in the family of religion, as indeed they always have been to our own day. Aquinas and Bonaventure were fellow students at the University of Paris; each became a licentiate with right to teach and lecture publicly as *Magister regens*; separately though in unity of purpose they replied to the attacks made by Guillaume de Saint-Amour, ostensibly against holy poverty but in reality in jealousy of the academic success of mendicant friars at Paris and Oxford; together Thomas and Bonaventure (and their Orders behind them) won the day; together, in October, 1257, they received the solemn bestowal of the degree of Doctor, at the university, where our saint was acclaimed *Doctor Devotus*.

This friendship did not cease when, upon the resignation of Bl. John of Parma, in February, 1257, Bonaventure, though not yet thirty-six years old, was elected Minister-General of the Friars Minor during a peculiarly difficult period in the Order, and before the end of that year was obliged to return to Italy and to leave the scholarly atmosphere of the French university with only his great work there to remain his bond—especially his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*,<sup>2</sup> his treatise *De Paupertate Christi* and his *Determinationes Quaestionum circa Regulam FF. Minorum*, the two latter his defense of the mendi-

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cants, and several hundred extant authentic sermons.

Their friendship and mutual admiration never ceased. Years later, in fact shortly before both saints were told to report at Lyons for the great Council called by Gregory X—that Fourteenth Œcumenical Council at whose later sessions St. Bonaventure presided and effected a union with the Greeks—that Council proceeding to which the saintly Dominican fell ill and died (4 March, 1274), and during whose sessions the saintly Franciscan followed his friend to Sister Death (15 July, 1274), the Doctor of Aquin asked the Doctor Devotus from which books he had acquired his knowledge, for, as Father Wilfrid notes in his introduction to the English version of St. Bonaventure's treatise on the Clares, *De Perfectione Vitæ ad Sorores*,<sup>3</sup> "St. Thomas considered Bonaventure the greatest light in the learned firmament of his age." For answer, and in no spirit of self-complacency, Bonaventure pointed to his crucifix. The story goes, too,—but let Father Wilfrid tell it: "When Pope Urban IV decided to institute the feast of Corpus Christi, he commanded St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure to compose each an Office in praise of the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. The day came when the saints presented their compositions to the Pope. St. Thomas read his aloud, and as he read, Bonaventure, overcome with the sublimity of thought and the beauty of imagery, coupled with the exactitude

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of religious truth and the dignity of expression, could not restrain his admiration. Persuaded that God's hand and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were in the words to which he listened, and that his own composition was, in comparison, weak and spiritless, he there and then, it is said, tore into shreds the work he had prepared." <sup>4</sup>

This story is doubtless authentic. It may be, too, that of the delightfully Franciscan account of the Cardinalatial insignia, which story you all know: how, when on 23 June, 1273, Bonaventure, much against his will, was created Cardinal-Bishop of Albano, by Gregory X (he had previously been nominated Archbishop of York by Clement IV, but the saint, in keeping with his singular humility, had pleaded against this honor and the Pope yielded), the papal envoys bearing the red hat found the saint washing dishes outside a convent near Florence and were requested by him to hang the hat on a bush until his hands were free to take it. Who but a Franciscan, a poet and saint, would have received in just this way the greatest distinction the Holy Father could bestow?

But mixed in with these plausible narratives are certainly some apocryphal legends in his life, one at its very outset. As we know, the saint, born at Bagnorea in the vicinity of Viterbo in 1221, the son of Giovanni di Fidenza and Maria Ritella, received his father's name in baptism. But that John was changed to Bonaventure when, an infant, he was,

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according to a late fifteenth-century legend, brought to St. Francis to be cured of an illness, and that St. Francis upon seeing him exclaimed, "*O buona ventura!*" is highly improbable, the name as a name and not an ejaculation having been borne by others before him.<sup>5</sup>

His life story, however, seems on the whole singularly free of gloss, perhaps in part because it was so crowded with documented accomplishments that the hagiographers had no space left for embroideries, that is with pious traditions possibly true yet unsubstantiated. And that life story is one of a poet as well as savant and saint. We see the three combined in his writings, the poet and saint especially in his mystical writings—in the *De Triplica Via*, the *Soliloquium*, the *Lignum Vitæ*, the *De Sex Alis Seraphim*,<sup>6</sup> the solemnly beautiful *Vitis Mystica* on the Passion, the aforementioned *De Perfectione Vitæ* written for the use of Bl. Isabelle of France and her Poor Clares, and perhaps in this category of his mystical works belongs the sublime *Conferences on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost*.<sup>7</sup>

"But," as Frédéric Ozanam has observed in his study of thirteenth-century Franciscan poets,<sup>8</sup> "when poetry has ensnared a congenial spirit it does not loose its hold until it has called forth songs." And Ozanam continues: "The Doctor, historian and Minister-General of the Order of St. Francis, had perforce to succumb to the frailty of all im-



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passioned hearts, and he, too, composed verses. Like his master he chose a mistress for his thoughts: he chose Poverty, whom he personified as the sovereign of all poor virgins—the Virgin Mother of the God Who was born in a stable."

His devotion to Our Lady stirred both poet and saint in him, and in a practical manner. He founded at Rome, about 1264, the Society of the Gonfalone, one of the earliest confraternities in the Church and forerunner of the Children of Mary and of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin. During the fourth general Chapter at Assisi, 1269, he enacted that a Mass be sung every Saturday throughout the Order in honor of the Mother of God. Six years before that he had prescribed the evening bell in memory of the Annunciation, the origin of our now universal Angelus. As Harold Goad<sup>9</sup> has it, "A happy poet was he in his institution of the Angelus, the bell that rings three times each day, to call the world to pause in its stream of business and say its 'Ave' to the Mother of God." But to return to Ozanam, "The holy Doctor," he says, "did not intend to leave to the moulded metal the duty of praising the Mother of Christ; he himself, on her behalf, had touched as it were all the chords of the Christian lyre, in his psalms imitated from David's, his popular sequences, canticles of joy and sadness."<sup>10</sup>

Among these, none is lovelier in its Franciscan

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childlikeness, than his *Ave, Cœleste Liliū!*, a Latin poem of eighty-three *ottava rima*. The poem is so delicate, so almost playful in its simplicity, that some scholars have disputed its authenticity, forgetful that the consummate theologian was every inch a Franciscan, was embodiment of the soul of mysticism, was a saint always devoted to Our Lady Immaculate, a saint of whom his teacher Alexander of Hales was later to say that he "seemed to have escaped the curse of Adam's sin," and whom the exacting Dante placed among the saints in his *Paradiso*, whom Sixtus IV canonized (1482) and upon whom another Sixtus, a century later, bestowed the title of *Doctor Seraphicus* as one of the principal Doctors of the Church and as an undeniable tribute to his all-absorbing love for God. The Latin text of *Ave, Cœleste Liliū!* commences thus:

*Ave, cœleste liliū!*  
*Ave, rosa speciosa!*  
*Ave, mater humilium!*  
*Superis imperiosa!*  
*Deitatis trichinium!*  
*Hac in valle lacrymarum*  
*Da robur, fer auxilium,*  
*O excusatrix culperum!*

In addition to his poems to Holy Mary, his *Office of the Passion*, written at the request of his friend St. Louis of France<sup>11</sup> is actually a sublime poem in prose form. I might mention also, though

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I wish it were not necessary, his famous *Responso-rium* in honor of the Thaumaturgus of Padua; this is a beautiful little Latin poem made horrific through the anonymous and ungrammatical English mistranslation we sing or recite every Tuesday at popular devotions to St. Antony. As, however, it is usually spoken of as the "miraculous responsory," doubtless the Seraphic Doctor and the Saint of the Whole World have forgiven the poetic crime a translator committed in their name and despite this have worked wonders through its devout recitation.<sup>12</sup>

And then, and dearest to us all when St. Bonaventure is spoken of as poet, is that exquisite hymn of the Nativity of Our Divine Lord, that matchless invitation to "all the Faithful" to "come and adore Him, born the King of Angels," the truly lovely and typically Franciscan hymn, so reminiscent of St. Francis and Greccio, the *Adeste Fideles*. Though not found among his indisputable works, the hymn has generally been attributed to St. Bonaventure with no formidable adversaries against this claim. And it is well. For Christmas is in a peculiar way beloved by children and by friars and by all other simple little folk; and happy are they, possessing the loveliest of all Christmas hymns, in feeling that its appealing words came from the pen and from the heart of a friar, one who loved Jesus and His Mother with all the love in his soul. The hymn, invariably sung at Christmas time and even

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everywhere among non-Catholics, is so familiar, both in Latin and in the best among its forty English versions, that a reprint here would be redundancy. We all know it by heart, for it lives in all our hearts. When you hear this eight-stanza hymn, especially the four stanzas commonly sung at Benediction during Christmastide, think of St. Bonaventure and his own overflowing love for

*Deum de Deo,  
Lumen de lumine,*

and of his awe before the fulfillment of the Divine mystery:

*Patris æterni  
Verbum caro factum!—*

and then with him, and with the Seraphic Family through all these centuries, and with the choirs of angels, and with the shepherds and the poor, let us in spirit in merry-holy company "hasten to Bethlehem" and

*Venite adoremus,  
Venite adoremus,  
Venite adoremus Dominum.*

With the music of this Christmas hymn—this Christ-Mass hymn—and the ineffable sweetness of its words ringing in our ears, let us then leave its author with a parting observation. The bond that united two mendicant Doctors of the Church, two

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saints, was not dissolved when Aquinas died in March and Bonaventure in July of that same year, 1274. Dominican and Franciscan were still in harmony. At St. Bonaventure's Requiem at Lyons, at which the Sovereign Pontiff and the King of Aragon assisted in person, the funeral oration was delivered by a Friar Preacher, Pietro di Tarantasia, Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia, who subsequently went to Rome as Pope Innocent V. The title of *Doctor Seraphicus*, officially given by Pope Sixtus V (1587), to replace that of *Doctor Devotus* bestowed in his lifetime, was first given him in print in 1333 in the Prologue of the *Pantologia* by a Friar Preacher, Rayner of Pisa.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Catholic Encyc.*, ii, 653.

<sup>2</sup> An English edition of this, together with S. Bonaventure's *Six Wings of the Seraphim* and his *Twenty-Five Injunctions*, is contained in *A Franciscan View of the Spiritual and Religious Life*, trans. by Father Dominic (Devas), O.F.M. (Thomas Baker, 72 Newman St., London, 1922).

<sup>3</sup> *Holiness of Life, being St. Bonaventure's Treatise De Perfectione Vitæ and Sorores*, Englished by the late Laurence Costello, O.F.M., and edited by Father Wilfrid, O.F.M., 2nd edition; Editor's Introduction, p. xxviii (B. Herder Book Co., 1928).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding the repeated discrediting of this folk-tale, it is still sometimes related in popular biographies of the saint, even those by savants of the Order, e.g. in the revised ed. of the brochure *St. Bonaventure*, by Father Thaddeus, O.F.M., pp. 1, 2 (Cath. Truth Soc., London).

<sup>6</sup> This work is issued in an Engl. trans. by Father Sabinus Mollitor, O.F.M. under the title *The Virtues of a Religious Superior* (B. Herder Book Co., 1921).

<sup>7</sup> The first critical edition of the complete works of St. Bonaventure, in Latin, is that published by the Friars Minor at Quaracchi, near Florence: *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventuræ S.R.E. Episcopi Cardinalis Opera Omnia, edita studio et curâ P.P. Collegii S. Bona-*

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*venturæ in fol. ad Claras Aquas* [Quaracchi] 1882-1902, ten vols. In its preparation the editors visited over 400 libraries and examined nearly 50,000 MSS.

<sup>8</sup> Ozanam: *The Franciscan Poets in Italy of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. and annotated by A. E. Nellen and N. C. Craig; pp. 133-4 (David Nutt, London, 1914).

<sup>9</sup> Harold Elsdale Goad: *Franciscan Italy*, p. 207 (E. P. Dutton & Co., New York).

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> King Louis IX, Patron of the Third Order, and a direct ancestor of the present writer.

<sup>12</sup> Since the above was written, further study has convinced me that the *Responsorium*, or "*Si Quæris*," could not have been composed by St. Bonaventure but became associated with him because of his deep veneration for St. Antony and because he probably caused the sequence to become generally known. The Friars Minor of Quaracchi (*Ad Claras Aquas*) did not include it even among the supposititious works of the holy Doctor, in their definitive edition of his writings (*Opera Omnia*, Quaracchi, 1882-1902). The sequence, which is found textually in the O.F.M. liturgical office of St. Antony (see *Breviarum Romano-Seraphicum*, die 13 Junii, Resp. ad Lect. VIII), and is believed to have been composed between 1232 and 1240, gathers strong support for the theory that it was written by Friar Julian of Speyer. On this point see a very interesting anonymous article in *St. Antony's Almanac*, 1908 (St. Bonaventure's Monastery, Holy Name Province, Paterson, N. J.).

<sup>13</sup> Bonaventure now ranks with Aquinas among the eight chief Latin Doctors of the Church: SS. Ambrose and Augustine, Jerome and Gregory, Thomas and Bonaventure, John of the Cross and Peter Canisius. The most recent addition to the list of D.D. of the Ch., now numbering 27, is St. Robert Bellarmine, Confessor and Cardinal, of the Soc. of Jesus, who was officially elevated to the doctoral dignity by Pope Pius XI, on 28 October, 1931—see Father Lonergan's interesting article in *America*, 7 Nov., 1931.

## XII.

### "*The Laureate of Wedded Love*"

WHEN neither a league of nations nor a doctor's consultation can agree among themselves, how can one expect a scattered and arbitrary jury of critics to pass unanimous verdict upon the cumulative esthetic value, or the question of genuine contribution to major poetry, of a singer but a generation removed from the witness stand?

During his lifetime Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore had the unique experience of finding himself at first the most popular and later the least popular and least read of poets. They responded in a ringing salvo of praise to *The Angel in the House*, buying almost a quarter million copies within space of a few years, seeing only the poem's surface appeal as a glorification of wedded love, which in the Victorian era was accounted the supreme virtue—and on that score they must have accepted

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Coventry as a saint, for during his span of seventy-three years he was to bury two wives and himself be buried by the third, to be father by his first wife of six children and by his third wife of a late-born son with the precious little name of Epi-phanius. The public saw in *The Angel* only a paean to domestic love; the subtle and even then mystical reaches of the poet's mind were lost on the people. But when sorrow had come to him, and death to his household, and he had made that memorable journey with Aubrey de Vere to Rome, and had returned to England carrying the heart of Rome in his own heart, his greatest odes poured forth, and the now lost poem the *Sponsa Dei*, containing the fullest expansion of his transcendental views, and the perfect ode *Deliciæ Sapientiæ de Amore*, that vindication and defense of virginity in the Catholic sense, and that glorious work *The Unknown Eros*,—then the public decided Mr. Patmore had cheated his readers, who asked for innocuous sweetness and received mystical theology done into poetry. It was permitted an assistant librarian at the British Museum, befriended by Leigh Hunt and by the future Lord Houghton and by Tennyson, encouraged by Browning and Bulwer-Lytton, to be author of a book of *Poems* (1844), to be a contributor to the Pre-Raphaelite *Germ*, to put forth in 1853 a more ambitious volume, *Tamerton Church Tower and Other Poems*, above all, to be the young Church of



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England husband of the young and beautiful Emily Andrews, daughter of a Nonconformist minister who was Ruskin's tutor in Greek before the young student went to the university. This was all as it should be, respectable, traditional, and the little flood of Patmore babies and their mother's delicate health only drew the public's ear closer to Coventry's poems and essays.

And then *The Angel in the House*, of which the first part appeared in 1854, which Ruskin proclaimed ought to become "one of the most *blessedly* popular" poems in our language, did indeed make Patmore's work the poetic idol of England. The vulgar mind could understand the commonplace-ness of parts of *The Angel*, could appreciate its daring, could easily scan the iambic octosyllabic rhyming lines of this simple and for the most part joyous story, and the sentimentalists were touched by the fact that this idyll of domestic love was inspired by the poet's own marriage, by Emily and "a world of love shut in, a world of strife shut out." No wonder Edmund Gosse proclaimed Patmore the "Laureate of Wedded Love."

Yet it is doubtful if those who echoed Gosse, those others who called Coventry "Poet of the Affections," quite realized that his Primal Love was other than that read on the surface lines. Even in those his Protestant days the mystic note was evi-

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dent; even then marriage was the "terrible sacrament"; even then his key note was

This little germ of nuptial love  
Which springs so simply from the sod,  
The root is, as my song shall prove,  
Of all our love to man and God;

even then he could divulge the basic philosophy of his life and work by glorifying a marriage not of time but of eternity. "The relation of the soul to Christ as *His betrothed wife*," he wrote in his diary, "is the key to the feeling with which prayer and love and honor should be offered to Him." "He regarded marriage, quite correctly," writes Sister Madeleva,<sup>1</sup> "as the reflection in human relations, of the perfect union of God, the Lover, with the human soul, His beloved." Of course this philosophy does not fully develop, does not reach its apogee, until we come to *The Unknown Eros and Other Odes* (1877), where the soul, in utter abandonment beyond human imitation, cries out:

Thy love has conquered me; do with me as Thou wilt,  
Sheathe in my heart sharp pain up to the hilt,  
What could make naught the touch that made Thee  
mine!

Lover divine  
Thou still art jealously and wholly mine.

.....  
And, if You choose to come this eventide,  
A touch, my Love, will set my casement wide.

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This, as Sister Madeleva observes, is neither the ordinary poetry of sentiment, nor piety sweetened to taste and served in rhyme. "It is the intensest of apocalyptic speech about a relation, soul-shaking, personal, and irrevocably binding. If ever the nuptial relation of the soul and God had a biographer, it was Patmore." He was indeed the Laureate of Wedded Love, but of a marriage more sublime than ever a Gosse could vision, the wedded love of God and the soul, a nuptial union as other-worldly as was St. Francis' espousal of Lady Poverty, a marriage as holy as that of Christ for that extension of His Incarnation, the Church.

But even in Patmore's earlier days of *The Angel* there was the adumbration of this opening of the full flower to the sun. And the public could not see it; could not grasp the tremendous import of the angel adventuring out of the house into realms higher and *more loving*, in the "Wedding Sermon" and its appeal that even the body's bond be revealed as

All else utterly beyond  
In power of love to actualize  
The soul's bond which it signifies.

The public could not see or, seeing, could not understand. Or if it could, it forgave for sake of such tender heart-breaking things as the "Azalea" ode, written while Emily lay dying of tuberculosis and an overdose of anti-Catholicism; or the public for-

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gave his religiosity for sake of *The Toys*, when he, impatient then self-accusing father-mother to his six young children, tells us—

My little Son, who look'd with thoughtful eyes  
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,  
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,  
I struck him, and dismiss'd  
With hard words and unkiss'd.  
. . . . His Mother, who was patient, being dead.  
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,  
I visited his bed,  
But found him slumbering deep,  
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet  
From his late sobbing wet.  
And I, with moan,  
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;  
For, on a table drawn beside his head,  
He had put, within his reach,  
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,  
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,  
And six or seven shells,  
A bottle with bluebells,  
And two French copper coins, ranged there with  
careful art,  
To comfort his sad heart.  
And when that night I pray'd  
To God, I wept, and said:  
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,  
Not vexing Thee in death,  
And Thou rememberest of what toys  
We made our joys,  
How weakly understood  
Thy great commanded good,  
Then, fatherly not less

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Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,  
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,  
"I will be sorry for their childishness."

When he returned from Italy with the Catholic seal of Confirmation on his forehead and, not long after, with a Catholic wife on his arm and a Franciscan Third Order affiliation in his soul and, most heinous crime, with Catholic poems gathering in his mind, Victoria's henchmen were not eager to applaud. Yet now had he entered the zenith of his creative power. During twenty years of a serene marriage with Marianne Byles, convert and friend of Cardinal Manning, Coventry's greatest work was accomplished. This was the period of *The Unknown Eros* and his finest odes; it was the period, also, when the fickle world, which had groveled before him in his lesser chaunting now in his golden singing left him in splendid isolation—in isolation with the few discerning poet-critics who knew wheat from chaff, in isolation with those saints with whom he spent absorbed hours—the *Poems* and *Dark Night of the Soul* of St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa's *Road to Perfection*, the *Summa Theologicum* of St. Thomas.

The "Winter" poem in *The Unknown Eros* may almost be said, as Ernest Rhys<sup>2</sup> notes, "to introduce some new rhythms into English, or if that is to say too much, it may be claimed that it succeeds in discovering the medium for the expression of those

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highly elusive feelings which it is hard to express in lyric without endangering the music by too introspective a note. It may be fairly claimed that Patmore added a faint accent of his own to the lyric vocabulary." And Maurice Francis Egan, in his admirable study of the structure of the Odes,<sup>3</sup> commenting on the poet's description, difficult to understand, of their verse form as based upon catalexis, or significant rhythm-filled pause, says: "Coventry Patmore's music was deliberately composed by him, on hints found in the poets, from Drummond of Hawthornden to our time, who had made 'some of the noblest flights of English poetry.' He restores silence to the singer, for his 'catalexis' is only silence filled by the beating of time. He enables the student who could not find the law of the Ode among the many lawless imitations of Pindar, to touch a standard by which the finest form of the lyric may be judged. . . . The practice of Coventry Patmore, who consciously advanced the musical quality of English verse many degrees, shows that, in his best moments, he looked on rhyme as a mere accessory." In the sonata, "If I Were Dead," which manifests the results of the poet's theories, Patmore used rhyme with almost lawless audacity; fortunately, says Dr. Egan, one forgets this in the admirable effect produced by accent and pauses, so managed that silences seem as the shadow of waving leaves<sup>4</sup>:—

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“If I were dead, you’d sometimes say, Poor Child!”  
The dear lips quiver’d as they spake,  
And the tears brake  
From eyes which, not to grieve me, brightly smiled.  
Poor Child, poor Child!  
I seem to hear your laugh, your talk, your song.  
It is not true that Love will do no wrong.  
Poor Child!  
And did you think, when you so cried and smiled,  
How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake,  
And of those words your full avengers make?  
Poor Child, poor Child!  
And now, unless it be  
That sweet amends thrice told are come to thee,  
O God, have Thou no mercy upon me!  
Poor Child!

Now let us have Patmore’s “Winter,” recalling  
Ernest Rhys’ observation:

I, singularly moved  
To love the lovely that are not beloved,  
Of all the Seasons, most  
Love Winter, and to trace  
The sense of the Trophonian pallor on her face.  
It is not death, but plenitude of peace;  
And the dim cloud that does the world enfold  
Hath less the characters of dark and cold  
Than warmth and light asleep,  
And correspondent breathing seems to keep  
With the infant harvest, breathing soft below  
Its eider coverlet of snow.  
Nor is in field or garden anything  
But, duly look’d into, contains serene

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The substance of things hoped for, in the Spring,  
The evidence of Summer not yet seen.  
On every chance-mild day  
That visits the moist shaw,  
The honeysuckle, 'sdaining to be crost  
In urgency of sweet life by sleet or frost,  
'Voids the time's law  
With still increase  
Of leaflet new, and little, wandering spray;  
Often, in sheltering brakes,  
As one from rest disturb'd in the first hour,  
Primrose or violet bewilder'd wakes,  
And deems 'tis time to flower;  
Though not a whisper of her voice he hear,  
The buried bulb does know  
The signals of the year,  
And hails far Summer with his lifted spear.  
The gorse-field dark, by sudden, gold caprice,  
Turns, here and there, into a Jason's fleece;  
Lilies, that soon in Autumn slipp'd their gowns of  
green,  
And vanish'd into earth,  
And came again, ere Autumn died, to birth,  
Stand full-array'd amidst the wavering shower,  
And perfect for the Summer, less the flower;  
In nook of pale or crevice of crude bark,  
Thou canst not miss,  
If close thou spy, to mark  
The ghostly chrysalis  
That, if thou touch it, stirs in its dream dark;  
And the flush'd Robin, as if he saw it, sing;  
But sweeter yet than dream or song of Summer or  
Spring  
Are Winter's sometimes smiles, that seem to well  
From infancy ineffable;



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Her wandering, languorous gaze,  
So unfamiliar, so without amaze,  
On the elemental, chill adversity,  
The uncomprehended rudeness; and her sigh  
And solemn, gathering tear,  
And look of exile from some great repose, the sphere  
Of ether, moved by ether only, or  
By something still more tranquil.

The year 1880 brought the Dark Angel Death into the house of Patmore; nor did that angel leave the place a while. For the sudden passing of Coventry's wife was followed two years later, in her nearby convent, of his daughter Emily, or Sister Mary Christina,<sup>5</sup> for nine years a treasured member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Sister Christina was a poet in her own right,—indeed Osbert Burdett rather staggers one by acclaiming her place to be "beside Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti, and above Emily Dickinson," and declares the substance and often the form of her poetry is "as authentic as any to be found, among the small section of Christian mystical verse, in English literature."

Mr. Burdett, by the way, a Patmore enthusiast, in 1921 produced a book voicing his appreciation of Coventry, in which he expatiated upon everything Patmorean *except* the poet's fervent Catholicism and mysticism—and these attributes happen to be the very essence of his being! This book was called *The Idea of Coventry Patmore*.<sup>6</sup> But he was not an idea; he was a poet, one of the major poets

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of nineteenth-century England. He was not an idea; he was since boyhood an amateur scientist, and always a profound intellect. He was not an idea; he was an aloof aristocrat and, paradoxically, also a fraternal-minded Tertiary of St. Francis.

The death of a poetically gifted son, Henry, in 1883, was the third visit of the angel to the house within a few years. This sorrow stilled at length, except for occasional flashes, the utterance of poetry in Patmore's soul. But it gave birth to a series of brilliant prose essays, the most significant of which were gathered into book form, *Principle in Art* (1889), *Religio Poetæ* (1893), and *The Rod, the Root and the Flower* (1895).<sup>7</sup>

His evening was one of peace. For there was the gentle marriage to Harriet Robson and the birth of the child with the saintly-awful name; there was an exquisite friendship with Alice Meynell, who strove so valiantly to reawaken public veneration for Coventry; there was a beautiful camaraderie with the young Francis Thompson<sup>8</sup> and long visits to Pantasaph, the Capuchin monastery in Wales where these two Tertiaries found their soul's dearest peace. Patmore did much to encourage the poetry of both Thompson and Mrs. Meynell, and in the eyes of each he became almost the embodiment of a cult.

So, if the world had forgotten him, he had likewise forgotten the world in reaching out to a world not of this glass-dark vision. He had never cared

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for applause, had never sought it,—and, I suspect, rather enjoyed being misunderstood by the multitude and understood by only the very few! He was more surprised over the vociferous reception of *The Angel* than over the oblivion of subsequent years. He could afford to wait. And time is vindicating that waiting. The most fastidious always knew his genius, and always will know it. But in addition, the public's growing interest in mysticism (or what the public thinks is mysticism), plus a present-day contradictory arousal to naturalism, will swing the Patmore pendulum on its return orbit. Already it is in motion. The sway of opinion is all on the side of ascendancy; it has swung out from the cave of oblivion, and not many today would longer care to ally themselves with the mistaken because outmoded dictum of Professor Tinker of Yale: "Coventry Patmore, serenely convinced of his own genius, has passed with Southey into the silence." There remains a happy norm, where criticism will rest its case between two extremes.

Few today go as far as did Francis Thompson, to whom the memory of Patmore remained "the direct vision of that oceanic vast of intellect."<sup>9</sup> Few indeed would say with Osbert Burdett that "The intellect of Coventry Patmore is the greatest philosophical intellect that has expressed itself in English verse. There is more pressure to the square inch in him than in any other poet,"<sup>10</sup> and, elsewhere, that

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he was "the most subtle philosopher on marriage that the modern, western world has yet produced."<sup>11</sup> Not many, perhaps, even in the language of metaphor, would agree with Alice Meynell that he is a poet of "enormous sincerities"<sup>12</sup>; is a priest in poetry, authorized by a tacit consecration; is the "watcher," profoundly vigilant, brave for compassions beyond the wont of literature. But many are coming to see in him a poet who was, to quote Katherine Brégy, "in his great moments, one of the supreme lyric artists"<sup>13</sup>; many can say with John Drinkwater that "Patmore was a poet whose best work will take a far higher place yet than it has done"<sup>14</sup>; many can say with Professor Carver that *The Unknown Eros* is "among the principal contributions to nineteenth-century poetry," and that Patmore, who died in 1896, "is only now coming into his rightful position in critical appreciation."<sup>15</sup> Certainly most of us can say *placet* to Frederick Page's "I have thought that a sufficiently accurate definition of Coventry Patmore (omitting only his idiosyncrasy) would be, that he was a Catholic poet: a Catholic who was a poet, in a degree beyond that of (say) Aubrey de Vere; a poet who was a Catholic, in a sense beyond what Mr. Burdett has any occasion to say; that is, not only a Thomist, but a Franciscan—spiritually, of course, and, as it happened, literally."<sup>16</sup>

Yes, literally a Franciscan, a Capuchin Tertiary, and that explains a great deal. "Literally a Fran-

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ciscan" is in itself an explanation for Francis Thompson, Poet of Celestial Vision, Poet of the Return to God; for Dante, Pilgrim of Eternity and Poet of the Supernatural; for Jacopone da Todi, the Little Fool of Christ; for a lot of other disreputable saints. There seems to be nothing anybody can do about it. One must accept them, or turn to the atheist poets and writers of *vers-de-société*. Literally-a-Franciscan explains a triple-bridegroom whose glorification of human nuptials veiled a marriage of God and the soul. It was as literally-a-Franciscan that he was received by the Unknown Eros when, dying at Lymington in the November of 1896, he was attended by friars; it was as literally-a-Franciscan that his body, clad in the brown habit of a Tertiary, was borne to the little sea-coast cemetery; it was as literally-a-Franciscan the soul of the Laureate of Wedded Love found then, as always it had known, that

In Godhead rise, thither flow back  
All loves.

<sup>1</sup> Sr. M. Madeleva, C.S.C., "The Religious Poetry of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Catholic World*, Nov., 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Rhys: *Lyric Poetry*, pp. 356-7 (J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London, 1913; E. P. Dutton & Co., New York).

<sup>3</sup> M. F. Egan: "The Ode Structure of Coventry Patmore," in *Studies in Literature*, pp. 98, 101 (B. Herder, 1916).

<sup>4</sup> Interested readers who have not access to the volumes by Patmore, can find some of his poems, among other places, in Crosse's *Everyman's Book of Sacred Verse*, Stourton's *Regina Poetarum*, Kilmer's *Dreams and Images*, Leslie's *An Anthology of Catholic Poets*, Walsh's *The Catholic Anthology*, Untermeyer's *Modern British Poetry*, the *Le Gallienne Book of English Verse*, Markham's *The Book of Poetry*.

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Brief prose studies, besides those referred to in this article, are Alice Meynell's in the *Cath. Encyc.* (vol. xi) and Kelly's *Great Catholics of Church and State* (pp. 91 sqq.).

<sup>5</sup> Osbert Burdett: *Critical Essays*, pp. 86, 87; art. "Two Foot-Notes on Patmore" (Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1926). Those interested in the story of the gifted and saintly daughter of the poet should read *A Daughter of Coventry Patmore, Sister Mary Christina, S.H.C.J.*, by a Religious of the Soc. of the Holy Child Jesus; Preface by the Abbot of Buckfast.

<sup>6</sup> Osbert Burdett: *The Idea of Coventry Patmore* (Oxford University Press, 1921).

<sup>7</sup> These were supplemented in 1921 by a volume of his last prose writings (Oxford Univ. Press), and by a *Catalogue* of the poet's library, issued by Everard Meynell.

<sup>8</sup> After Patmore's first visit to Pantasaph, Francis Thompson wrote to Alice Meynell: "I have had a charming visit from Mr. Patmore. He bore himself towards me with a dignity and magnanimity which are not of this age's stature. By the way, he repeated to me two or three short poems addressed to yourself. I hope there may be a series of such songs. You would then have a triple tiara indeed—crowned by yourself, by me, and highest crowned by him" (*The Life of Francis Thompson*, by Everard Meynell, p. 142; *Scribner's*, 1926).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Burdett: *The Idea of C.P.*

<sup>11</sup> Burdett: *Critical Essays*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> See Alice Kimball Tuell: *Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation*, p. 204 (E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1925).

<sup>13</sup> Katherine Brégy: *The Poets' Chantry*, p. 116 (B. Herder, 1913).

<sup>14</sup> John Drinkwater: *The Muse in Council*, p. 226 (Houghton Mifflin, 1925).

<sup>15</sup> George Carver: *The Catholic Tradition in English Literature*, pp. 304-5 (Doubleday, Page & Co. [Doubleday, Doran], 1926).

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Page: "Coventry Patmore—Points of View," art. in *The Catholic World*, June, 1921.

### XIII.

#### *"The Pilgrim of Eternity"*

HOMER, Æschylus, Sophocles, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare: is there one other who can stand with these six supreme poets of the world? Petrarch, perhaps, hardly the frigid Milton. Or can the number be pared down further, omitting Æschylus and Sophocles? In Homer and Virgil are mirrored the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome. The glory that *was*, the grandeur that *was*. Dante IS. He who may be said to have made Italian poetry, and to have stamped all modern literature with the mark of his personality, can never be spoken of in the past tense. Shakespeare is the universal poet of the secular world; Durante, the "enduring one" (now shortened to Dante), remains the poet of Christendom, the popularizer of Catholic theology and Catholic philosophy yet always the poet of a supernatural-natural union. In this he outranks the ancients, in this he

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supplements Shakespeare; to this extent he transcends them all, as a wise commentator has said, "by virtue of his plenary inspiration which envisages the natural and supernatural in a synthesis that is the root-conception of the universe."<sup>1</sup> The *Divina Commedia* is his title-deed to a fame that has survived empires' rise and fall, that after the eighteenth century won the reluctant recognition and then enthusiastic acclaim of Nordic critics, a fame that today is in full flower, and this a flower that will never fade. And this sacred poem, and his others, came from the pen, wingborne—for his surname, Alighieri,<sup>2</sup> means the "Wingbearer"—of a Franciscan Tertiary, let us be humbly proud of this fact.<sup>3</sup> History's greatest Christian epic poet loved the Friars Minor, rejoiced to wear the livery of the Order of Penance, counted among his intimates Giotto and other Tertiaries, painters and poets, and his bones, removed from San Francesco, Ravenna, lie to this day in the Conventuals' church of Santa Croce in his natal city of Florence.

Connecting link of a great transition period, Dante was born at the very dawn of the Italian Renaissance, while the *Divina Commedia* may be said to be the last book of the Middle Ages. In his own person and in his achievements, he bridges the two eras and makes them articulate and understandable. Individual almost to a fault, ahead of his time yet intensely representative of his time, his



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aim in literature, as he pointed out in his book *De Vulgari Eloquentiâ*, was to make the vulgar tongue what Latin had been, not the tongue of common parlance but the incorruptible and permanent language of cultured men. That might be, in time, and time through Dante and his followers did come to the rescue of Italian and lifted it to unity through gradual absorption and conquest of the inferior elements and dialects, not however from pre-arranged fusions, as Dante rather ideally had hoped. Language does not grow that way. The roots of language are as the roots of century plants, as the roots of oak trees and boxwood. Time, acting on Dante's plea, has in every country made the national vulgate the language of that country's culture, of her literary masterpieces.

Politically, he was in the very maelstrom of battle most of his days, and Florence was a center of storm. Florence was the head of the Guelph league, and Dante the Florentine, fresh from his studies and doctorate at Bologna, his head filled with astronomy and science and the Cabala, with Ovid and Virgil, with philosophy and rhetoric, with poets and rhymers, now made eager space for militant politics. He took part in the cavalry's defeat of Tuscan Ghibellines at the battle of Campaldino, in 1289, the poet being then twenty-four years old. Subsequently when the Guelph party split into two factions, *Bianchi* and *Neri*, "Whites"

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and "Blacks," Dante, finding himself with five companions elected to the *Signoria*, the chief magistracy of the republic, banished the leaders of both factions and presently saw his beloved Florence laid under interdict. In 1301 Charles of Valois entered the republic with an army, restored the aristocratic *Neri* to power and drove Dante into exile. Even in banishment the poet did not relinquish his dream of a restored empire, and when Henry of Luxemburg was elected emperor as Henry VII, Dante in 1304 wrote his famous work *De Monarchiâ*, in three books. This, and much more, must be read in the proper places to get an understanding of the political side of our poet's career; here we can but touch its hem, as it were, and this only to give a faint idea of the stress and strife that hedged him in all his days, yet a strife through which he grew spiritually stronger, intellectually more stable, and poetically invincible.

Certain types of Protestants, who erect statues to Giordano Bruno and other apostates, who seem to delight in attempted glorification of anyone or anything the Church has condemned and in condemning what the Church has glorified, who claim as their own whatever seems worth the claiming, have in recent times hailed Dante as a precursor of the Reformation. Why? Perhaps because in his youth he was indirectly responsible for a papal interdict laid upon Florence. Perhaps because he had encouraged the *Bianchi* whereas the *Neri* had received the

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favor of the Pope. Perhaps because in his *Inferno* he consigns several Popes, including even the canonized Celestine V, to hell. Perhaps because in *De Monarchiâ* he opposes temporal dominions for the Church, by inference, in these words: "Wherefore man had need of a twofold directive power according to his twofold end, to wit, the Supreme Pontiff, to lead the human race in accordance with things revealed, to eternal life; and the Emperor, to direct the human race to temporal felicity in accordance with the teachings of philosophy." On such slender threads do the children of darkness suspend their idols! Dante a precursor of the so-called Reformation? On guard, good people: had Alighieri lived in the sixteenth century, his *Inferno* would perhaps have included Tudor bluebeards and Lutheran deflowerers of nuns' vows!

On the contrary, whereas one may believe what one will, without loss of faith, regarding Temporal Power, and may without losing prestige be numbered in an army opposed to an army having the favor of the Pope, that is one thing and a small matter in comparison with the upholding of Catholic dogma. And there Dante is unassailable. His theological position as an orthodox Catholic has been repeatedly vindicated, notably by the erudite Dr. Moore, who declares that "there is no trace in his writings of doubt or dissatisfaction respecting any part of the teaching of the Church in matters of doctrine authoritatively laid down."<sup>4</sup> The beau-

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tiful episodes of Casella and Manfred in the *Purgatorio*, no less than the closing chapter of *De Monarchiâ* itself, bear witness, says Professor Gardner, to Dante's reverence for the spiritual power of the Papacy, which he accepts as of Divine origin.<sup>5</sup> The *Divina Commedia* could never have been written save by one who in every fiber of his being, every pulse of his heart, every functioning of his mind, was intensely and inalienably a Catholic, Catholic in philosophy, Catholic in theology, Catholic in culture. Dante was so intensely Catholic that ordinary lay life was not enough to satisfy his soul; he must needs be the "Poet of the Supernatural" and, far more truly than Byron, the "Pilgrim of Eternity." He was so intensely a Catholic that ordinary lay life was not enough for him; he must needs wear the cord and scapular of a Tertiary of St. Francis. That he was an exemplary Tertiary, a model of that Order so devoted to the Holy See, is evidenced in his being selected to represent all Tertiaries, in that famous fresco, by a pupil of Giotto, in the lower church of San Francesco, at Assisi, on the right facing the high altar: our Blessed Father St. Francis, followed by two angels, welcomes three figures, the Friar Minor (Giovanni di Muro), the Second Order (St. Clare), and the Tertiary (Dante).<sup>6</sup>

Let them make him an Anglican Erastian rural dean, if they like, born out of time and place; but let us get back to our poet as poet. And so, his first

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book, the *Vita Nuova*, an exquisite medley of lyrics, sonnets and poetic prose, telling the story of his virginal love, a love more of the imagination than of the heart, a dream, a phantasy, a sigh, a heavenly ideal, a beautiful girl clad in a crimson robe, whom he calls “Beatrice.” She who was, perhaps, Beatrice daughter of Folco Portinari and wife of Simone de’ Bardi, died in 1290, and the *Vita Nuova* was completed about 1294. It is not known that Dante ever met her, had ever spoken to her. His love for her was purely spiritual, the *amor amicitiae* defined by St. Thomas Aquinas: “That which is loved in love of friendship is loved simply and for its own sake.”

One of the most beautiful *canzone* in the book is this, in whose translation Rossetti<sup>7</sup> so happily retains the spirit of the original:—

I was a-thinking how life fails with us  
Suddenly after such a little while;  
When Love sobbed in my heart, which is his home;  
Whereby my spirit waxed so dolorous  
That in myself I said with sick recoil:  
“Yea, to my Lady too this Death must come.”  
And therewithal such a bewilderment  
Possessed me, that I shut mine eyes for peace;  
And in my brain did cease  
Order of thought and every healthful thing.  
Afterwards, wandering  
Amid a swarm of doubts that came and went,  
Some certain women’s faces hurried by,  
And shrieked to me, “Thou too shalt surely die.”

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Then saw I many broken, hinted sights,  
In the uncertain state I stepped into.  
Meseemed to be I know not in what place,  
Where ladies through the streets, like mournful lights,  
Ran with loose hair and eyes that frightened you,  
By their own terror and a pale amaze.  
The while, little by little, as I thought,  
The sun ceased and the stars began to gather,  
And each wept at the other;  
And birds dropped in mid-flight out of the sky;  
And earth shook suddenly;  
And I was 'ware of one, hoarse and tired out,  
Who asked of me: "Hast thou not heard it said?  
Thy Lady, she that was so fair, is dead."

Then lifting up mine eyes as the tears came,  
I saw the Angels like a rain of manna,  
In a long flight, flying back heavenward,  
Having a little cloud in front of them,  
After the which they went and said "Hosanna."  
And if they had said more you should have heard.  
Then Love said, "How shall all things be made clear;  
Come and behold our Lady where she lies."

These 'wilderling phantasies  
Then carried me to see my Lady dead.  
Even as there I was led  
Her ladies with a veil were covering her;  
And with her was such very humbleness  
That she appeared to say, "I am at peace."

Here, comments Francesco de Sanctis, in his monumental history of Italian literature, "is the lyrical note of humanity as it was then, its way of being, of believing, of feeling, of expressing itself. Beatrice, the young angel come down from heaven,

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who does not quite become a woman, a fleeting apparition who goes back to heaven in a white cloud-let while the angels sing 'Hosanna!' but also remains on earth as the light of truth, transforming the lover into the apostle—Beatrice is the embodiment of the whole religious and philosophical romance of that time. She is the life that has its truth in the other world, and that here is nothing but Beatrice, a phenomenon, an appearance, the veil of the eternal truth. If the earth is a place of brief sojourn and trial, poetry is above this earth, in the realm of truth. Beatrice begins to live only when she dies."<sup>8</sup> Here also is the secret cell of Dante's own religio-philosophical world: "*Morte gentile*" — "Gentle Death,"—"our Sister, the death of the body," as St. Francis had said but three generations earlier,—the passage from shadow to light, from phantasm to reality, from tragedy to comedy. Death is the beginning of life, its transfiguration, and heavenly life, since it is all joy and has no sad ending must therefore be a comedy.

And so in time, out of those first fruits the *Vita Nuova*, and that lesser loveliness the *Convivio*, the beauty of even this youthful love and philosophy were schooled into the Christian stoicism and mysticism of the poet's masterpiece. Scholastic and mystic, Aristotelian in mind and Platonist at heart, poet and philosopher and scientist and rhetorician, through the indifferent years of the exile of him who thought not of years—for he was the "Pilgrim

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of Eternity"—Dante wrought his work, completing it in 1321, almost at the hour of greeting *Morte gentile*. Under his pen grew and grew the wonderful otherworldly singing to which Dante gave the title the *Commedia*, but to which upon his death the world, awed by its celestial power and beauty that made the word comedy by itself inappropriate and inadequate, called it divine, and as the *Divina Commedia* it has come down to us through the ages.

The sacred poem is an allegory of human life, in the form of a vision of the world beyond the grave, written avowedly with the object of converting a corrupt society to righteousness: "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery, and lead them to the state of felicity." The world has always been too much with us. And like the shades in Dante's *Purgatorio*,

*La grave condizione  
Di lor tormento a terra li rannicchia.*

The escape to happiness lies not in lifting that burden but in forgetting it, going on pilgrimage away from it, exchanging it rather than renouncing it, daring to find escape in God. Dante is relating a vision that had long since been granted him, when during seven days he passed through hell, purgatory, and paradise, guided at first by Virgil, representing human philosophy acting in accordance with the moral and intellectual virtues; then he is led by Beatrice, representing Divine philosophy illumi-



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nated by revelation, upward through nine moving heavens of intellectual preparation, into the true paradise, the spaceless and timeless Empyrean; then the pilgrim is led by St. Bernard, the loving contemplative, to the footstool of the Mother of God, at whose intercession he obtains a foretaste of the Beatific Vision, the poem rising to and closing on a tremendous climax which beggars description.

By a happy symbolism, each of the three parts of the poem—the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, the *Paradiso*—contains thirty-three cantos, the number of Our Lord's years upon earth in visible body, the extra canto of the *Inferno* being an introduction to the whole. These hundred cantos are written in what is called the *terza rima*, or rhyme of three: in every three lines there are two that rhyme, while the middle line carries on the next group of three, rhyming with its first and third line, the middle line again carrying on in its turn, and so through each canto to the conclusion. Dante so modified this from the popular poetry of his day that it may be regarded practically as his invention.

So scrupulously did Dante pick his every word, both for its sense and its music—one translator says "Dante's *bello stile* combines the logical precision of an Aquinas with the melodic virtuosity of a Bach"<sup>9</sup>—and so extremely difficult would the sustained *terza rima* be in a rhymed version throughout the whole hundred cantos in English, that in consequence there has never been a perfectly satis-

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fyng English version of the complete poem. The literal translations in prose have at least that virtue, that they can be exact transcriptions. But you cannot transfer beauty merely by translating words. And the *Divina Commedia* is not prose! Cary's has long been considered the most famous metrical translation. But Cary wrote in blank verse and his music also for the most part is a blank. One of the nearest approaches possible in our language is of very recent date; I refer to Lacy Lockert's Englishing in *terza rima* of the *Inferno*,<sup>10</sup> on the whole an admirable work. To speak of English *terza rima*, it must be understood one means, of course, its English equivalent, the precise Italian form with hendecasyllabic lines being quite impracticable in our language. Difficult though the equivalent is, with our paucity of English rhymes and the metrical demand for definitive phrase sacrifice, Dr. Lockert's version certainly puts the Cary blank verse to shame. But Dr. Lockert has given us only a third of the poem, and that not the finest, the *Purgatorio* being rather generally considered to be artistically the perfect canticle.

It might be possible so to torture the poem (and the poet, and the reader) as to retain the hendecasyllabic line; it might be possible to employ *terza rima* throughout the one hundred cantos; it might be possible to do both these great things and yet make an accurate translation, and not only an accurate translation in phraseology but also a tran-

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scription of the musical *tempo* and melody. I say it might be possible, in a couple of lifetimes, to achieve this *tour de force*, this miracle, rather, and the result might be poetry and the translator's sanity might survive the grueling ordeal. But the possibility of all this is somewhat dubious, while its probability is not in the least doubtful!

For the best of recent renditions of the complete poem, the finest known to the present writer is unquestionably that of Jefferson Butler Fletcher, published in 1931 by The Macmillan Company.<sup>11</sup> Professor Fletcher's device is a two-thirds rhymed version, rather than prose, rather than blank verse, rather than the equivalent of *terza rima*. He has thereby retained the vigor of Dante's expression together with his melody, as nearly as they can be retained in English, with none of the necessary gymnastics to maintain a *terza rima* rhyme scheme yet giving the effect of that scheme by a two-thirds rhyme. To give just one instance for comparison with previous translators, here is Cary in the opening passage of the *Purgatorio*, Canto XXVIII:—

Through that celestial forest, whose thick shade  
With lovely greenness the new-springing day  
Attempted, eager now to roam, and search  
Its limits round, forthwith I left the bank:  
Along the champion leisurely my way  
Pursuing, o'er the ground, that on all sides  
Delicious odor breathed. A pleasant air  
That intermitted never, never veered,

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Smote on my temples, gently, as a wind  
Of softest influence; at which the sprays  
Obedient all, leaned trembling to that part  
Where first the holy mountain casts his shade.

This gives the sense of Dante's text, but the music is lost, the flat blank verse structure is false to the master's plan of the *terza rima*, and the very free phraseology is often an unhappy choice. And now Professor Fletcher of Columbia University:

In eagerness to enter and survey  
The sacred forest verdurous and dense,  
Which to my eyes was tempering the new day,  
Without delaying more I left the stair,  
Taking the level with unhurried step  
On soil that gave forth fragrance everywhere.  
A pleasant breeze, that not to more or less  
Had alteration, smote upon my brow  
With no more than a zephyr's soft caress;  
Whereat, all tremblingly responsive, swayed  
The branches towards that quarter, one and all,  
Where casts the holy mountain its first shade.

And so we must bring this paper to an end, even though it be to leave the poet in Purgatory rather than in Paradise! Let us close on the twin waves of truth, utterances of poet and priest. This comment, like the cry of a white flame, from Francis Thompson:<sup>12</sup>—

"That poem is so august, so shot with lights of peace and tenderness, that it is accepted as the gospel of mediæval Christendom. Withal it has a severity stern

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even to truculence, which is of Dante pure and simple—another spirit from that ‘Hymn to the Sun’ of the gentle Francis of Assisi. And all this because he is Dante—that strange unity of which we know so much, and so little.”

And this rhetoric, truth-bearing, from Dr. Thomas J. Shahan:<sup>13</sup>—

“One day the labor of ages blossomed in a perfect and centennial flower, the ‘Divina Commedia’ of Dante, that has ten thousand roots in the daily life, the common doctrine and discipline of the Catholic Church, and remains forever an unapproachable document of the mediæval genius, indeed, but also the immortal proof of how thoroughly the Catholic Church had educated the popular mind and heart in all that was good, true, and worthy of imitation, in antiquity as well as in the history that then as now men were making from day to day.

“He was conscious himself that heaven and earth had built up the poem in his great heart. Perhaps he was also conscious that God was making of him another Homer, another Virgil, out of whose glorious lines all future ages should, even despite themselves, drink a divine ichor—the spirit of Jesus Christ as exemplified in Catholicism.”

<sup>1</sup> F. Moynihan, in *The Catholic World*, Feb., 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Thompson called attention to the similarity between Dante's surname and that of Shakespeare: “Who dreams that the supreme Italian poet and the supreme English poet bore almost an identical surname? Yet so it is. Alighiero (the name of Dante's grandfather) is a German name, and probably was derived from Aldiger, which means ‘Rulespear’ ” (*The Works of Francis Thompson*, vol. iii, 239).

<sup>3</sup> “That Dante was educated at the school of the friars at Sta. Croce, and buried in the habit of a Tertiary by the friars of Ravenna, are matters of undisputed tradition. Than that he was spiritually

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a son of Francis, few things can be surer . . . As for Dante's special learning, if he took his theology from St. Thomas, the ardent mysticism that transfuses it is of St. Bonaventure; while in matters of doctrine he surely promulgated that one most dear to the Franciscans, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, in favor of which the English Brothers and especially Duns Scotus and Richard of Middleton contended. No feature in his mighty poem is so conspicuous as his deep devotion to Our Lady, to whom he addresses through the mouth of St. Bernard some of his loveliest lines. Of St. Francis and the Franciscans he also writes in many places, as when the Seraphic Father comes to the deathbed of his spiritual son, Guido da Montefeltro, but is warned off by the demon, who points out that he died unshriven of mortal sin, or when he describes in a simile how the Brothers go traveling, walking singly in silent meditation across a solitary land. But the great tribute to St. Francis comes from the mouth of St. Thomas Aquinas in the Eleventh Canto of the *Paradiso*, answered in the twelfth by St. Bonaventure in a corresponding eulogy of St. Dominic" (H. S. Goad: *Franciscan Italy*, pp. 249-250, 251).

<sup>4</sup> Moore: *Studies in Dante* (3 vols., Oxford, 1896-1903), as quoted by E. G. Gardner in *Cath. Encyc.*, iv, 631.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund G. Gardner: art. "Dante," in *Cath. Encyc.*, iv, 631.

<sup>6</sup> See Peter F. Anson's *The Pilgrim's Guide to Franciscan Italy*, p. 13 (Sands & Co., London, 1927). This, by the way, is an invaluable handbook for the devout traveler desiring to tread the footsteps of St. Francis.

<sup>7</sup> Rossetti's translation is given in Mary Bradford Whiting's *Dante: The Man and the Poet*, pp. 33, 34 (Appleton, 1923).

<sup>8</sup> Francesco de Sanctis: *History of Italian Literature*, vol. i, p. 68; trans. by John Redfern (N. Y.: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1931).

<sup>9</sup> *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by Jefferson Butler Fletcher, Prof. of Comparative Literature at Columbia University; Introduction, p. vii (N. Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1931).

<sup>10</sup> *The Inferno of Dante*, trans. into English Terza Rima Verse with Intro. and Notes, by Lacy Lockert, A.M., Ph.D., formerly Asst. Prof. of Engl. at Kenyon College (Princeton University Press, 1931).

<sup>11</sup> See Note 8. Another English translation is that of A. R. Bandini, a modern Florentine, a line-by-line rendition rhymed; can be had in three volumes or in a one-volume edition of the trilogy, with notes and illustrations (People's Pub. Co., 40 Columbus Ave., San Francisco).

<sup>12</sup> *The Works of Francis Thompson*, vol. iii, art. "Dante," p. 244 (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd.).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. Shahan, S.T.D., J.U.L.: *The Middle Ages—Sketches and Fragments*; art: "Catholicism in the Middle Ages," pp. 215, 216 (Benziger Bros., 1904).

## XIV.

### *Leaves from the Thornless Rosetree*

IN MORE than one devout soul a life's increasing love for the Seraphic Father and his three Orders—a love which, once begun, never dies but grows daily, blossoming for many into realized vocation (happy, fortunate souls!)—had its inception in receipt of two or three roseleaves sent from a sacred garden of Assisi. These little leaves have, each, a spot or several spots, of red-brown,—as though they were bright blood drops of long ago softened with the mellowing of seven centuries, or as though the Precious Blood of the Passion had here mingled with the ash-brown of the Lesser Brethren. The stems of these roseleaves are without thorns,—as though in compensation for the pain of those blood spots. The little holy place where these thornless roses still grow lies beside a colonnade leading from the sacristy of Sta. Maria degli

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Angeli—that Patriarchal Basilica beneath whose dome stands, for us, one of the holiest shrines of Christendom, the Portiuncula chapel, cradle and mother church of the Franciscan family—to the Chapel of the Roses.

We all know the story handed down through the centuries: How on a snowy night when the Poverello was assailed by a temptation he ran out naked and rolled in the brambles and thorns to still the torment within. The moon breaking through clouds revealed white and red roses; their thorns were gone but their leaves were stained with the blood of a Saint, while angelic singing was heard on the frosty air. Thornless, blood-stained, those rosetrees have thus bloomed ever since.<sup>1</sup>

I have ventured to liken some of those of our poets who have not separate articles in this series, to those leaves from the thornless rosetree. For they are true Franciscans, in this paper drawn from the First, Second and Third Orders and from several countries; they are united in mutual veneration for the Founder, bearing his Rule if not his blood—and obedience to that Rule turns the brambles of pilgrimage into rose paths whose thorns, if there, we cannot see.

When we speak of Ægidius, that is BL. GILES OF ASSISI, we are carried back to the genesis of things, to the dawn of the Order. At that time when, as say the *Fioretti*,<sup>2</sup> "St. Francis appeared as a



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new herald of Christ to give an example of holy living, of humility, and penance," after two years he was joined first by the Assisian noble and a civic magistrate, Bernard of Quintavalle, "endowed with marvelous prudence and very rich in temporal goods," and then by Peter Cataneo, a lay canon, or doctor of laws. After eight days they were joined by Egidio, a husbandman who made up by shrewdness and ready wit whatever he lacked in learning. The blessed Father raised the kneeling aspirant and bringing him into the Benedictine hut adjoining St. Mary of the Angels, said: "Almighty God has sent us a good brother; let us, therefore, rejoice in the Lord, and eat together in charity." Then, continue the *Fioretti*, "When they had eaten, Brother Francis and this Giles went to Assisi to obtain some cloth to make him a habit"—which shows there was already an established dress for the Order,—“and he became one of the most glorious religious whom the world has ever seen in the contemplative life. Immediately after his reception, St. Francis went with him into the March of Ancona, singing with him and greatly praising the Lord of heaven and earth.” Singing with him, you hear? For both were poets, minstrels of God. All his long life in religion Brother Giles was a poet, in his prose “Golden Sayings” and “Brother Giles’ Wisdom”<sup>3</sup> as well as in his metrical lauds and lyrics. A sonnet which he composed in honor of holy chastity is

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preserved for us, as well as fragments of some other verse. The Sonnet to Chastity commences:—

*O santa castitate! Quanta e la tua bontate!  
Veramente tu se' preziosa, e tale  
E tanto soave il tuo ardore  
Che chi non ti assaggia, non sa quanto vale.  
Impero li stolti non conoscono il tuo valore.*

In his tiny convent garden at Perugia he would listen to the cooing doves, and speak to them. And on summer mornings he would walk between his flower-beds, singing the praises of God and, in imitation of his master, Francis, would play as if on a violin, scraping one stick across the other.<sup>4</sup> Blessed Giles, with a poet's ear for exactness of sound but also with a vivid sense of the nearness of the supersensual (which may be called the secret of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation), once said that the Lady Quail taught him much about divinity, because instead of saying "La, la"—(there, there), she always said "Qua, qua" (here, here).<sup>5</sup>

The third in point of time though not of importance of the historical biographies of our blessed Father,<sup>6</sup> and the second composed as a poem, is the rhymed Office, or *historia* as it was called in the literary expression of the Middle Ages, the *Vita Metrica* whose author was the friar MASTER HENRY OF PISA. Formerly the *Vita Metrica* was ascribed to John of Kent, or John Cantius, an English friar. The real authorship has now been satis-

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factorily assigned, through the efforts of Père Edouard d'Alençon.<sup>7</sup> Like many another of the early friar-poets, Master Henry of Pisa was a musician and singer—"He was my singing teacher in the time of Pope Gregory the Ninth," wrote Fra Salimbene. Bro. Henry wrote many melodies and sequences; composed both text and music to *Christe Deus*, *Christe meus*, *Christe Rex et Domine*.

FRA GIACOMINO OF VERONA in his short rude epics in the dialect of his natal city, *De Babilonia Civitate Infernali* and *De Jerusalem Celesti*, possibly suggested ideas and artifices, as well as the subject of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. These poetical and allegorical histories, as it were, of Hell and Paradise, the former 280 lines, the *Celesti* 340 lines, are given in an abridged prose form in the study of thirteenth-century poets by Frédéric Ozanam,<sup>8</sup> who notes that they are "modeled exactly on the form of the Chansons de Geste which spread throughout Europe during the thirteenth century," and that "the lines of thirteen syllables, grouped in quatrains and terminating in the same rhyme, recall the alexandrines and the single-rhymed passages of old Carlovingian poems."<sup>9</sup>

A most interesting and versatile Tertiary was JOHN OF BRIENNE, warrior, statesman, poet. He was younger brother to Duke Walter III of Brienne, Prince of Tarentum, who led a papal army against Frederick II and whom Francis as a youth followed to the wars—and returned so soon to be-

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còme a knight of the Prince of Peace. Through the fortunes of war, having gone forth to Damietta in the Crusades, John of Brienne found himself for a time King of Jerusalem. Through it all he remained a Tertiary and a poet, an excellent poet both in the French and Sicilian tongues.

One must not overlook, among our early English friar-poets, JOHN PECHAM (Peccham, Peckham). Successively disputant at Oxford, Canon of Lyons, Provincial of England, *lector sacri palatii* at Rome, and then Archbishop of Canterbury, he was consecrated for that primatial See by Pope Nicholas III in 1279. Dying in 1292, his remains rest at Canterbury, but his heart was buried in the church of the Grey Friars, London. An admirable poet,<sup>10</sup> Friar John's *Philomela* is worthy of mention. Among his sacred metrical compositions is a beautiful Office for the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. Harold Goad seems to imply that the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury might also have been author of that celebrated and exquisite allegory<sup>11</sup> the *Sacrum Commercium B. Francisci cum Domina Paupertate*, whose authorship has also been claimed for Giovanni Parenti (John Parens), first successor to St. Francis as Minister-General, and for Bl. John of Parma, seventh General (succeeding Crescentius of Jesi and preceding St. Bonaventure). But as it is clearly stated in every Codex that the work was written during "the month of July after the death of St. Francis," that is to say July, 1227, and as

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Friar John was not born until 1240 and Blessed John did not enter the Order until after 1230, for neither can authorship be seriously claimed. Nor is the claim for Bro. John Parens tenable, as Father Cuthbert explains in an introduction to the Carmichael English version of the work.<sup>12</sup> And he adds: "For the present it is safest to admit frankly that the author of *Sacrum Commercium* is unknown, and to conclude with Fra Ubertino da Casale that he was '*quidam sanctus doctor hujus Sanctæ Paupertatis professor et zelator strenuus.*' "

Among other early British friar-poets we find THOMAS OF HALES, with his *Luve Ron* in transitional English.<sup>13</sup> FRIAR WILLIAM HERBERT freely translated hymns into the English tongue. FRIAR MICHAEL OF KILDARE wrote lyrical English poetry about the beginning of the fourteenth century. His poems, "Swet Jhesus, kind and free," and others, in T. Wright's *Reliquiæ Antiquæ* (ii, pp. 190-194), show great skill in verse construction. Another English friar, RICHARD LEDEREDE, Bishop of Ossory, wrote Latin hymns to replace the secular songs in use amongst his clergy.

Royalty has given to the King of kings some of its greatest jewels. From the white light that beats upon a throne to the celestial light of a Poor Clare's cell, is the exchange of a lesser for a greater palace. The English-Portuguese princess, PHILIPA OF AVIS AND LANCASTER (1437-1497) entered a

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Clarissan cloister near Lisbon, there becoming famous both for her sanctity and for her poetic gifts. Here is Sister Philipa's poem "To Holy Jesus," as translated<sup>14</sup> from the Portuguese by Dr. Thomas Walsh:—

I lack in service, lack in love,  
Yet never cease in my desire;  
Forever crying Thee above,  
Unresting never from my tire.

O Life and Warmth and Holy Light,  
Boon infinite and all complete,  
My Jesus, my true God, in plight  
Who on the Cross my love would meet!—

For all the failure of my heart,  
For all the lacking in my love,  
I call on Thee to grant a part,  
Send down the peace Thou holdst above!

Although officially placed among "authors unknown," and although there are extant adumbrations or skeleton forms of the poem dated a half-century prior to his birth, there is a very persistent tradition that the celebrated *Anima Christi* was written by BL. BERNARDINE OF FELTRE,<sup>15</sup> Friar Minor, son and heir of the noble house of Tomitano (1439-1494). The probability is, that Fra Bernardino revised and popularized earlier compositions of the prayer-poem, giving us the indulgenced form we now have and most priests recite daily in their thanksgiving after Mass. Fra

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Bernardino having made it known to the world, a later Tertiary, St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Company of Jesus, included it in his "Spiritual Exercises" without comment, aware that the exercitant or reader was already familiar with it and its Franciscan popularization. There are about fifteen translations in prose and verse. This, by Dr. Thomas Isaac Ball, is quoted<sup>16</sup> in Father Britt's collection:—

Sanctify me wholly, Soul of Christ adored;  
Be my sure Salvation, Body of the Lord:  
Fill and satisfy me, O Thou Blood unpriced:  
Wash me, Sacred Water, from the side of Christ.  
Passion of my Saviour, be my strength in need:  
Good and gracious Jesus, to my prayer give heed:  
In Thy Wounds most precious let me refuge find:  
All the power malignant of the foeman bind:  
At death's final hour, call me to Thy face:  
Bid me stand beside Thee in the heavenly place:  
There with Saints and Angels I shall sing to Thee  
Through the countless ages of eternity.

Aside from the *Anima Christi*, Blessed Bernardine is noted for his reorganization and, in a certain sense, his founding of the charitable institutions called *monti di pieta*, an effectual remedy against usury. He was moreover one of our great missionaries in Italy of the fifteenth century, worthy namesake of St. Bernardine of Siena.

*O Filii et Filiae*, a hymn celebrating the mystery of Our Lord's Resurrection, was written by JEAN

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TISSERAND, Friar Minor (died 1494). In France, where it is still very popular, it is assigned in various *Paroissiens* to the Easter Sunday Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Famed as a Latin poet was GIOVANNI RIGUZZI VELLINI OF CAMERINO, called JOHANNES CAMERS, the greatest of the Humanist Friars Minor, who from 1490 till his death taught humanities at the University of Vienna.<sup>17</sup>

FRAY GABRIEL OF MATA, a Spanish friar-poet, who carried on the tradition of St. Francis as a cavalier or captain in the warfare of Christ, printed a poem in 1687 with this alluring title: *El Cavallero Asisio, en el vocimiento, vida a muerte del serafica padre san Francesco, en octava rima*.<sup>18</sup>

I make passing mention, and necessarily can say no more, of FRIAR WALTER COLMAN, English poet (1570-1645), except that he seems to have written verse protesting against spoliation of the Shrine of Our Lady at Walsington, Norfolk. I find him listed among *Recusant Poets*, 1535-1735, a Catholic anthology Louise Imogen Guiney had spent years in collecting and annotating but which was incomplete at her death and has remained in MSS.<sup>19</sup>

And so to modern times and to England. We can but briefly refer to three Franciscan poets, all Tertiaries,—briefly, because we must not let the present paper become a wearisome catalogue; because bio-



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graphical material on the two Cardinals is overwhelmingly vast and can be compressed into a few lines only by saying nothing but rather referring the reader to sources;<sup>20</sup> also because while all three have produced meritorious poems, the name of each as creative writer is rather better known in fields of prose composition.

LADY GEORGIANA CHARLOTTE FULLERTON, novelist, poet, biographer, translator from French and Italian, was born 1812 and died 1885. The youngest daughter of Lord Granville Gower, afterwards first Earl Granville, English Ambassador to France, by Lady Harriet Cavendish, second daughter of the fifth Duke of Devonshire, Lady Georgiana married Alexander Fullerton, an attaché of the embassy in Paris, and eventually followed her convert husband into the Church. Upon the death of their only son, in 1855, a loss from which Lady Fullerton never quite recovered, the parents devoted themselves to works of charity and the following year entered the Third Order of St. Francis. The bibliography of this gifted woman is of length and notable quality. Her verse was small in quantity but of a clean technique and some of it should live.

The Archdiocese of Westminster has been shepherded by exceptionally strong men ideally placed. Cardinal Wiseman's immediate successor, the convert HENRY EDWARD CARDINAL MAN-

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NING, and Manning's successor, HERBERT CARDINAL VAUGHAN of a staunchly Catholic family,<sup>21</sup> were, both of them, though the fact is too often forgotten, poets and Franciscan Tertiaries. Their output of verse is small and probably was regarded by themselves as little better than trivial though sincere; but it was in each case of sufficient quality to give the writer a place among poets, while their devotion to our Order, and their own lives of holy simplicity while in exalted positions, entitles them to a place among consistent Franciscan poets. Cardinal Manning's later years, with the increasing accent of his labors given to amelioration of the condition of God's poor, his active work in the League of the Cross for temperance, his efforts on behalf of the outcast, and the success of his mediation at the time of the great London Dock Strike of 1889, constitute him a very real Franciscan, brother and servant of the poor.<sup>22</sup>

As for the third Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vaughan, an iron circlet found, when he was laid out for burial, driven into the flesh of his left arm, is mute evidence of his asceticism and speaks with greater volume for his life even than his spectacular achievements for lay and clerical education, for his activities in the field of the workhouse system, in the preliminary investigation of Anglican orders, in his erection of Westminster Cathedral. I add to this but the concluding sentence from

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the monograph on Vaughan's life in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, than which no Franciscan could win greater praise for fealty to the spirit of the Order: "He knew how to win and to hold the allegiance of men, and the touching extracts from his intimate diary which were published after his death showed him to have been a man of exceptional and unsuspected humility."

<sup>1</sup> For brief description of the Garden and Chapel of the Roses, see *The Pilgrim's Guide to Franciscan Italy*, by Peter F. Anson, pp. 72, 73 (Sand & Co., London, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, part iii, pp. 283 sqq.; trans. revised by Dom Roger Hudleston, O.S.B.; intro. by Fr. Dominic, O.F.M. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd. London, 1926: The Orchard Books).

<sup>3</sup> *Aurea Dicta B. Ægid. Assis.* (Quaracchi, 1904); Engl. in *The Little Flowers* (*loc. cit.*) and in E. Salusbury: *The Saints of Assisi*, pp. 215 sqq. (Burns, Oates, 1926). See also precepts given in A. G. Ferrers Howell: *Franciscan Days* (John Murphy Co., Baltimore and New York).

<sup>4</sup> Leo Belcari: *Vita di frate Egidio*, chap. xxv. See Jørgensen: *St. Francis of Assisi*, pp. 109, 110 (1928 Engl. edition).

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Underhill: *Jacopone da Todi*, p. 149 (Dent, London; Dutton, New York, 1919).

<sup>6</sup> The first of course was Thos. of Celano's *Vita Prima*; the second was Julian of Speyer's rhymed legend, *Ad hoc quorundam*.

<sup>7</sup> *Miscel. Franc.*, IV, pp. 33, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ozanam: *The Franciscan Poets in Italy of the Thirteenth Century*, pp. 139-155; trans. by A. E. Nellen and N. C. Craig (David Nutt, London, 1914).

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 141. Ozanam published *The Poems of Fra Jacomino* in his *Documents pour servir a l'hist. litt. de l'Italie*, Paris, 1850. For an interesting appreciation of the work of Fra Giacomino, see Gasperi's *Hist. of Early Ital. Lit. to the Death of Dante*.

<sup>10</sup> John Peckham's writings are listed in *British Soc. of Franciscan Studies*, vol. ii, 1909; his 720 letters are found in Martin's *Registrum Epist. Fr. Joannis Peckham*.

<sup>11</sup> Goad: *Franciscan Italy*, p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> *The Lady Poverty: A XIII Century Allegory*, trans. and ed. by Montgomery Carmichael, with a Chapter on the Spiritual Significance

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of Evangelical Poverty by Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C.; Introduction, pp. xxviii-xli (Burns, Oates, London).

<sup>13</sup> For this name and those of the three poets following, I am indebted to footnotes (verified elsewhere) in Fr. Cuthbert's *The Romanticism of St. Francis*, 2nd ed., p. 173 (Longmans, Green, 1924).

<sup>14</sup> *The Catholic Anthology*, Walsh, p. 114 (Macmillan, 1927).

<sup>15</sup> See *Le Bienheureux Bernardin de Feltre*, by E. Flornoy, 3rd ed., pp. 189, 190 (Lacoffre, Paris, 1898).

<sup>16</sup> *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal*, ed. by Rev. Matthew Britt, O.S.B., p. 193 (Benziger Bros., 1924).

<sup>17</sup> A list of the classical authors he edited with annotations is given, with a brief biography, in *Language Studies in the Franciscan Order: A Historical Sketch*, by Fr. John M. Lenhart, O.M.Cap., p. 21 (*Franciscan Studies*, No. 5) (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1926), and in the *Report of the Sixth Annual Meeting, The Franciscan Educational Conference*, pp. 51, 52 (Capuchin College, Washington, D. C., 1924).

<sup>18</sup> See Chavin de Malan: *Hist. de St. François d'Assise*, p. 16 of supplement.

<sup>19</sup> See E. M. Tenison: *Louise Imogen Guiney: Her Life and Works*, appendix, descriptive bibliography, pp. 321-323 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1923).

Since writing the above, I have identified him with the elderly friar-scion of an ancient family. He is better known by his name in religion, Father Christopher à Sancta Clara. Victim of Puritan persecution of the friars from Douai, he died in a fetid dungeon in Newgate prison after four years there in chains. Among his poems was "Death's Duel" which he dedicated to Henrietta Maria, consort of Charles I. Also composed in verse a book on the controversies of the time, and translated into English the *acta* of St. Angela Merici. (See Hope: *Franciscan Martyrs in England*, p. 126; Francis Borgia Steck, O.F.M.: *Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution in England*, pt. II, ch. iii, pp. 241-250; Fr. Thaddeus, O.F.M.; *The Franciscans in England 1600-1850*, pp. 62, 72, 106, 191—portrait.)

<sup>20</sup> See W. H. Kent's *Life of Cardinal Manning*, and J. G. Snead-Cox's *The Life of Herbert Cardinal Vaughan*, for definitive biographies. For briefer study, see the *Cath. Encyc.*, ix, 604 sq. (Manning) and xv, 311 sqq. (Vaughan). It would be interesting to learn if a collateral blood-tie existed between the two Vaughan poets, the nineteenth-century Cardinal and the seventeenth-century Silurist, Henry Vaughan, to whose writings Louise Imogen Guiney was so devoted. In Wales, of course, the name Vaughan, like that of Lloyd, is as frequent as Smith or Jones in the United States.

<sup>21</sup> His mother used to spend an hour every day before the Blessed Sacrament, begging of God that He would call her children to serve Him in choir or sanctuary. Eventually all her five daughters entered

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convents, and of her eight sons, six became priests, three of them bishops (see *Cath. Encyc.*, xv, p. 312).

<sup>22</sup> Cardinal Manning's love for Tertiaries is evident from his own words: "The Saints and Blessed of the Third Order are to us a luminous cloud of witnesses, showing by their words and lives that though humility and charity are the highest reaches of perfection, nevertheless the way is easy and open to all in every state of life" (quoted by Marian Nesbitt, in her *Little Lives of Great Tertiaries*, p. 82; Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1928; Preface by Fr. Anselm Keane, O.F.M.).

## XV.

### "*The Poet-Priest of the South*"

PRIEST he was, was Abram J. Ryan, Franciscan Tertiary, in many respects exemplar of the now scarce soggarth type of secular, with oratorical gifts native to sons of Erin and with typical paternal love for each of his parishioners. A true pastor, rather than rector—shepherd, not ruler—whether as young priest at Nashville, or Clarksville, Tennessee, or, after the War, at New Orleans (where he edited *The Star*, a Catholic weekly), or at Augusta, Georgia (where he founded and edited the influential *Banner of the South*), or during his thirteen years at old St. Mary's, Mobile, Alabama—those years when, the war over and his chaplaincy, he could go

Back to where the roses rest  
Round a shrine of holy name,

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(Yes—they knew me when I came)  
More of peace and less of fame  
Suit my restless heart the best.<sup>1</sup>

Not, perhaps, an erudite scholar; he was too wholly consumed in the cure of souls, in his parochial duties, in his editorial capacity, in his poet's singing heart, in his lecture and reading trips, to give time to concentrated study; he was, nonetheless, naturally gifted, both as poet and Irish descendant, with the mastery of words. Gifted, one might say, almost to a fault. For his verse is too often rhetorical, too verbose, these and likewise too soft, at times too sing-song, too facile, perhaps, if I am not misunderstood, too sentimental.

I insert that if-I-am-not-misunderstood advisedly. For well I know the Southerner's loyalty to Father Ryan, the patriot, and his unwillingness to see less than perfection in Abram J. Ryan, the poet. I know well: for did I not once in a public address very nearly call him the American Adelaide Procter! And was I not very nearly verbally tarred and feathered in the ensuing heckling!

Father Ryan was a born weaver of words, he never rose to that severe self-regimen of the poet by which he could break through with one striking metaphor, or hew away the verbal padding, or polish the rough line, or subdue the cliché, or so gain in craftsmanship of the technician that his poems would stand out as it were in high relief. This they never did, not even his famous "Con-

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quered Banner" nor "The Sword of Robert Lee." They are a flat pattern on the page. This, however, does not imply a want of poetry in his soul, or its dearth in the transcribed image. He was unquestionably a poet, a minor poet whose influence may today be nil but whose verses during his lifetime if they were not revered as masterpieces by poets were memorized by every Southerner and their writer was almost idolized. He was pre-eminently the Poet Laureate of the Confederacy, Poet of the Lost Cause. Incalculable is the courage, the fighting spirit, and then the solace wrought by his verses in the hearts of those his sorely tried, valiantly failing compatriots of the Confederate States, whose cause was his, whose tears he shared, for whose welfare he was priested and had devoted his life and wore out his strength in the serving, and indeed for whom he went to his death while, in ill health, he lectured in many cities to further a charitable undertaking of great interest to the South.

Yes, priest he was, and poet he was, and of the South he was—"Poet-Priest of the South," as he has always been hailed. A more authentic poet, more truly poet of the real South, than, for instance, James Ryder Randall,<sup>2</sup> his fellow Catholic, who was born about the same year and who wrote "Maryland, My Maryland." Father Ryan, though revered as priest, though revered by all for his services while chaplain throughout the duration of



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the War of the Sections, is loved primarily as poet, specifically of course as patriot poet. He himself, conscious, as every poet must be, of his divine gift of song, yet held no egoistic illusions about his art. As he humbly but truly wrote in the preface to his collected verses, "They are incomplete in finish, as the author is; tho' he thinks they are true in tone. His feet know more of the humble steps that lead up to the Altar and its Mysteries than of the steepes that lead up to Parnassus and the Home of the Muses. And souls were always more to him than songs."

Nowhere is the purity and simplicity of his faith better evidenced than in the verses "A Child's Wish," in which he expresses a longing to be the "little key that locks Love's Captive in," the "little bell that tinkles for the Host," the chalice that "holds the Blood of Love," the little flower, and

I wish I were the altar where,  
As on His Mother's breast,  
Christ nestles, like a child, fore'er  
In Eucharistic rest.

But, oh! my God, I wish the most  
That my poor heart may be  
A home all holy for each Host  
That comes in love to me.

In its word economy and direct singleness this poem foreshadowed the cameos of that greater

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poet-priest of the South, John Bannister Tabb. Its companion-piece might be said to be "My Beads,"—Jesus and Mary, his two supreme loves since his boyhood renunciation of a temporal love (if indeed, "Their Story Runneth Thus" can be accepted as in part autobiographical). Father Ryan's devotion to Our Lady many times stirred his lyre as well as his prose pen—"Last of May," dedicated to the Children of Mary, Mobile Cathedral parish, is another of his well-known Marian poems, while a few fortunate bibliophiles still treasure copies of his prose tribute, *A Crown for Our Queen*.

Perhaps his loftiest spiritual singing, though again too verbose, reaches its apex in the eleven-stanza "Song of the Mystic":—

I walk down the Valley of Silence—  
Down the dim, voiceless valley—alone!  
And I hear not the fall of a footstep  
Around me, save God's and my own;  
And the hush of my heart is as holy  
As hovers where angels have flown!

. . . . .

In the hush of the Valley of Silence  
I dream all the songs that I sing:  
And the music floats down the dim valley,  
Till each finds a word for a wing,  
That to hearts, like the Dove of the Deluge,  
A message of Peace they may bring.

. . . . .

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But far on the deep there are billows  
That never shall break on the beach;  
And I have heard songs in the Silence  
That never shall float into speech:  
And I have had dreams in the Valley  
Too lofty for language to reach.

. . . . .

Do you ask me the place of the Valley,  
Ye hearts that are harrowed by Care?  
It lieth afar between mountains,  
And God and His angels are there:  
And one is the dark mount of Sorrow,  
And one the bright mountain of Prayer.

Here we have the real Abram J. Ryan, not the tireless army chaplain, not the brilliant rhetorical preacher, not the busy editor or lecturer, not the idolized patriot, not the magnetic personality with his famous flowing mane—those shoulder-length locks as famous in their day as was his contemporary Whistler's white crest, as was Napoleon Third's waxed mustaches. Here we have the real Abram J. Ryan the mystic, the soul given in utter abandon to the Divine Love, the contemplative, the lonely one who knows true companionship is found only amid "the hush of the Valley of Silence."

He was a mystic because he had exchanged earthly for heavenly love; he was lonely because he was a poet. And well he knew, what the prosaic world but dimly guesses and then only as a target,—

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Poets are strange—not always understood  
By many is their gift,  
Which is for evil or for mighty good,  
To lower or to lift.

Well he knew, as he says in another poem,

The Poet is the loneliest man that lives;  
Ah me! God makes him so—  
The sea hath its ebb and flow,  
He sings his songs—but yet he only gives  
In the waves of the words of his art  
Only the *foam* of his heart.

Its sea rolls on forever, evermore,  
Beautiful, vast, and deep;  
Only his *shallowest* thoughts touch the shore  
Of Speech; his *deepest* sleep.

The foam that crests the wave is pure and white;  
The *foam* is not the *wave*;  
The wave is not the sea—*it rolls* forever on;  
The winding shores will crave  
A kiss from ev'ry wavelet on the deep;  
*Some come*; some always *sleep*.

The above, published posthumously, is, I believe, Father Ryan's finest poem (unless that finest be his "Song of the Deathless Voice"), though one regrets his frequent use of italics, an outmoded manner of stressing what needs no artificial emphasis.

But this "loneliest man that lives" had an enormous following throughout his days, crowds of devoted admirers, especially in the dark days after

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the surrender at Appomattox, when the seven stanzas of his "Conquered Banner," whose measure he took from one of the Gregorian hymns, brought resignation and then peace to sad hearts in his beloved Southland,—

Furl that Banner, for 'tis weary;  
Round its staff 'tis drooping dreary;  
Furl it, fold it, it is best;  
For there's not a man to wave it,  
And there's not a sword to save it,  
And there's not one left to lave it  
In the blood that heroes gave it;  
Furl it, hide it—let it rest!

If Confederacy loved him for this, for "March of the Deathless Dead," for the "Lost Cause," for many another song, the North could share this reverence not only by victor's right of magnanimity but as its own gratitude to Father Ryan for his "Reunited," written after the yellow fever epidemic and Northern aid of 1878.

Early in his life as a priest, though that crowded life was not long, for he was less than fifty when he died, prematurely aged and fragile, he was in Rome. It was, in fact, while in the Eternal City that he made his profession in our Third Order; it was in Rome he knelt at the feet of that other Tertiary, the saintly Pius IX; it was after that memorable audience, that meeting of the two devotees of the Mother of God, two sons of Saint Francis, that the

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poet-priest wrote his finest quatorzain. Constructively it is not a true sonnet.

I saw his face today; he looks a chief  
Who fears not human rage, nor human guile;  
Upon his cheeks the twilight of a grief,  
But in that grief the starlight of a smile.  
Deep, gentle eyes, with drooping lids that tell  
They are the homes where tears of sorrow dwell;  
A low voice—strangely sweet—whose very tone  
Tells how these lips speak oft with God alone.  
I kissed his hand, I fain would kiss his feet;  
"No, no," he said; and then, in accents sweet,  
His blessing fell upon my bended head.  
He bade me rise; a few more words he said,  
Then took me by the hand—the while he smiled—  
And, going, whispered: "Pray for me, my child."

As the prematurely bent shoulders sank lower, as his curling mane went grayer, as the heart, saddened with the weight of the Southland's woe which was his own woe, began to break under the strain of burden, the indefatigable priest obtained leave of absence from Monsignor Quinlan to make an extended lecture tour of the country to further a praiseworthy and charitable undertaking. This good Bishop having died soon afterwards, Father Ryan's leave from St. Mary's was extended by his successor, Monsignor Manucy. It was while the priest was engaged in this three-year mission that the Dark Angel paid his visit to the poet. He had been ailing for years, and even when he was young his mortified body gave him the appearance of age,

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and, observes Dr. Hannis Taylor in his brief monograph, "with all this there was the dreamy mysticism of the poet so manifest in the flesh as to impart to his personality something which marked him off from all other men."<sup>3</sup>

His lecture tour took him, during the Lent of 1886, to Cincinnati. There he obtained a desired permission to make a private retreat at the Franciscan monastery, intending, at its close, to finish the writing of a prose *Life of Christ*, on which he was engaged, or it may be purposed to undertake. The life was not to be written, it was to be lived, transfigured: before the Paschal festival Christ and His priest were to look upon one another in the Beatific Vision.

The last days of the Tertiary poet-priest have only recently been narrated in their completeness, in a magazine article by a Friar Minor of the Province of St. John Baptist,<sup>4</sup> who fortunately had obtained lengthy and shakily written testimonials from eye witnesses of Father Ryan's passing—two ancient German lay-Brothers who are still today, happily, serving God in Religion.

In 1886 the old and typically Franciscan plain red brick St. Boniface Convent, in Cincinnati, was situated on Green Street—now Fehr Avenue—near Jackson Street, where the present parish church stands. In a little guest room on the second floor, whose latticed windows faced a small porch overlooking the cloister garden and adjoining the

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church, the soul of the South won immortality. It was Maundy Thursday, April 22. Near nine o'clock that night, fortified by the sacraments he had for years so faithfully served, surrounded by the Poverello's sons whom he as a fellow member in the Seraphic family loved so dearly, he went forth.

On the following morning, Good Friday, before the pastor of St. Mary's returned for his last journey to Mobile, Brother Donatus tiptoed into the death-chamber: I quote from Father Hyacinth's article mentioned above. "He wanted to see the dead poet, whose voice these many years had thrilled and consoled the crushed Confederacy, just once more. 'I laid the shroud a little to one side,' he writes, 'and was greatly struck with surprise. He looked very beautiful, and as if he were only forty years of age, whereas on the first day that he arrived he had seemed to me an old man, fully eighty years old.' "

<sup>1</sup> From the poem "St. Mary's," which with the others here quoted can be found in *Poems: Patriotic, Religious, Miscellaneous*, by Abram J. Ryan, with memoir by John Moran (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons).

<sup>2</sup> Randall was born 1839. There is still uncertainty both as to place and year of Father Ryan's nativity. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* gives Norfolk, Va., and 15 Aug., 1839, with no suggestion of doubt; Dr. Walsh likewise accepts Norfolk and 1839 as place and date. John Moran mentions Hagerstown, Md., and Limerick, Ireland, and 1834 and 1836 as suggested birthplace and year, but avoids controversy by leaving the disputed question where he found it. Abram J. Ryan received his early training from the Christian Brothers in St. Louis, his theological education at Niagara, N. Y., and Loyola College, Baltimore.

<sup>3</sup> *Catholic Encyc.*, xiii, 282.

<sup>4</sup> Father Hyacinth (Blocker), O.F.M., in *St. Anthony Messenger*, January, 1932.



## XVI.

### *"Lumen in Cælo"*

"Fate can not touch the soul sublime  
Taught to despise the things of Time.

"Whom should he fear? he can not yield,  
With God Himself for sword and shield!"—

SO WROTE a poet, this abstract from his commentary on Eccl. xxxiv, 16, lines which in miniature picture the life of their writer, always fragile in body, always strong of soul, with courage of the lion, and indeed himself, in name and in fact, the Lion of Juda.

A very old Latin prophecy on the Popes, for centuries popularly accredited to St. Malachy and first published in 1595, while it has been declared fraudulent is nevertheless highly interesting in the appropriateness of many of its descriptive titles assigned in prophecy to the Popes.<sup>1</sup> Far down the list occurs the title "*Lumen in Cælo*"—A Light in the Heavens, and the name which in the list it parallels,

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and which certainly it describes most fittingly, is that of a poet with soul sublime who, Franciscan-like, despised the things of transitory time, Gioacchino Vincenzo Raffaele Luigi Pecci, Pope Leo XIII.

Among the score or more of Papal members of the Seraphic family, the Third Order can count eleven: Honorius III, Gregory IX, Bl. Gregory X, Martin V, Innocent XII, Clement XII, Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI. Note that among these the last five have been successive occupants of the Chair of Peter including Pope Pius XI, now gloriously reigning; in other words, since the coronation of Pius IX, in 1846, or for close to a hundred years, the Holy See has had a Franciscan Tertiary as Vicar of Christ. Indeed the period is in a sense longer if we recall that Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti had entered the Order of Penance so long before as 1821, thus keeping his silver jubilee as a Tertiary the year he received the tiara as the saintly Pio Nono. The year he was crowned marked his twenty-fifth anniversary as a Franciscan; in the year in which Pius IX celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his admission to the Order of Penance, Joachim Cardinal Pecci, Bishop of Perugia, gave the first proof of his esteem and love for it by recommending the spread and growth of the Third Order to the priests of his diocese by a pastoral letter published in the diocesan

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calendar, 20 December, 1871. A few months later, 30 May, 1872, Cardinal Pecci put on the Tertiary habit and cord, in the monastery of the Friars Minor at Monteripido near Perugia. As a Third Order historian adds, "Immediately after, he retired to Mount Alvernia, where he tarried several days in solitude and prayer, meditating on ways and means to spread the work of that herald sublime of poverty and brotherly love whom now he, too, called father, St. Francis."<sup>2</sup>

There was another bond that made St. Francis and Leo XIII father and son—the cadenced strains of song, the heritage that unites all poets. The general reading public became aware of the poetical gifts of the Sovereign Pontiff when, in 1897, the *New York World* published an exquisite translation of his "Epistola ad Fabricium Rufum," done into English by Andrew Lang. When, three years later, the Pope's "Ode on the Opening Century" received worldwide welcome and translation into every tongue, the *New York Independent* through its editor William Hayes Ward expressed deepest admiration and wonderment at the spectacle of a nonagenarian turning poet.

Leo XIII did not turn poet in old age. For nearly eighty years he had been writing Latin verses, making use of many metres—hexameters, pentameters, iambic dimeters, hendecasyllabics, Sapphics, Alcaics, the elegiac couplet, and Ambrosian quantitative

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stanzas; he had produced charades, *jeux d'esprit*, epigrams, inscriptions, quatrains, and more serious work—stately odes, heroic hymns. A few were in Italian, but most of his poems were in the classic diction of Virgil and Horace.

Perhaps the earliest was a brief salutation to Fr. Vincent Pavani, S.J., when Joachim Vincent Pecci was but twelve years old,—

*An. MDCCCXXII*  
*AD VINCENTIUM PAVANIUM*  
*Nomine, Vincenti, quo tu, Pavane, vocaris,*  
*Parvulus atque infans Peccius ipse vocor.*

*Quas es virtutes magnas, Pavane, sequutus*  
*O utinam possim Peccius ipse sequi.*

This was freely translated by Father, later Monsignor, Hugh T. Henry (who made a complete translation of all of Pope Leo's poems,<sup>3</sup> as collected in the Bach edition of *Carmina, Inscriptiones, Numismata*, with additional matter and copious notes):—

Thy very name, Pavani, Vincent styled,  
Was mine—a little child.

What mighty virtues thou didst well pursue,  
Would I might follow, too!

The historian Father Bernard O'Reilly made interesting comment on this little poem's production:

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"Ever since the school-boy of Viterbo has become the teacher of the Christian world, European and American scholars have been able to admire and praise the classic taste and exquisite finish of the productions of his pen, in prose and verse. He gave early promise of uncommon literary distinction. Just as he had completed his twelfth year, a college festival was got up to welcome the Provincial of the Jesuits, Father Vincent Pavani. This gave to Vincent Pecci the first recorded opportunity of showing his proficiency in Latin verse, as well as his admiration for the character of the man who honored the name of Vincent."<sup>4</sup> In childhood the little son of Count Pecci of Carpineto was called Vincent, his mother having great devotion to the Dominican St. Vincent Ferrer; later in life the poet preferred to be called Joachim, traditional name of the father of Our Blessed Lady.

But we have had only the poet in embryo. Three years later, the lad, then fifteen years old and a student of humanities and rhetoric at the Collegio Romano, was unanimously awarded the prize in a six-hour Latin poem competition when, unaided, he produced 120 stanzas in hexameters, of unquestionable excellence. To him also were awarded first honors in Greek; while at the end of his rhetoric course he was chosen to deliver the Latin address, and selected as his subject, "The Contrast between Pagan and Christian Rome."

Meanwhile he took up, though as yet uncertain

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as to his calling, the study of theology as well as canon and civil law. In 1832, upon obtaining the doctorate of theology, as one of Count Pecci's sons he won admission to the Accademia dei Nobili, and entered upon further study of canon and civil law at the Sapienza University. While still in minor orders (1837) the young cleric was appointed domestic prelate by Gregory XVI; this was followed by other honors and offices, and on the last day of 1837 Msgr. Pecci was ordained priest, by Cardinal Odeschalchi. Then followed three fruitful years as Delegate or Civil Governor of the brigand-infested Province of Benevento; then three years at Perugia, "a hotbed of the anti-papal revolutionary party."

Appointed Nuncio to Brussels, on 19 February, 1843, he was consecrated titular Archbishop of Damietta by Cardinal Lambuschini. In Belgium, despite his encouragement of the bishops and laity in the debated school question, he was yet able to win the good will of the Liberals and the Court, and to him is owing the idea of a Belgian College in Rome (1844). Appointed to the vacant See of Perugia (retaining however his title of Archbishop), Msgr. Pecci first visited Paris and London, bringing him in touch with both Courts. And now for a moment—a moment lasting thirty-two years—we can leave the prelate at Perugia, while we quote the poet. For during his long episcopate his poet's imagination was at work—that long episcopate during which he was created Cardinal (19 Decem-

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ber, 1853) became as we have seen a Franciscan Tertiary, enlarged the diocesan seminary and established the Accademia di S. Tommaso, erected thirty-six new churches, remodeled many educational and other institutions, formed the Society of S. Gioacchino to assist priests impoverished by church fund confiscations, launched conferences of St. Vincent de Paul.

It was the poet's custom, while Bishop of Perugia, to celebrate in song such priests and nuns as were remarkable for any special excellence. When there was opportunity to make a play upon words, the gentle humorist could not resist. One instance will suffice, lines on the pastor at Castello di S. Elena, loved of all for his blameless life and modest manner. The translation is, as are those of the other poems quoted in this paper, by Monsignor Henry:

### SERAFINO PARADISI

Beneath our very eyes is placed the image meet—  
How a good shepherd feeds his flock in pasture sweet.

"His country and his name?" should you then chance to  
ask,  
This picture shall attempt, better than words, the task:

'Twill say: "Why, Paradise the land that claimeth him;  
And you will find his name amidst the Seraphim!"

To turn for a glance at our mitred poet's few but interesting secular verses, does not this brevity re-

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mind you of Father Tabb's economic cameos? It is called

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Sun-wrought with magic of the skies,  
The image fair before me lies;  
Deep-vaulted brain and sparkling eyes  
And lip's fine chiselling.

O miracle of human thought,  
O art with newest marvels fraught—  
Apelles, Nature's rival, wrought  
No fairer imaging!

A poem written in Italian for a young seminarian in temptation, begins in the original version—

*Quando impudico demone  
D'ogni nequizia pieno,  
In te col sozza anelito  
Sparge il suo rio veleno, etc.*

The translator's interesting rendition of the complete poem follows:—

### RECOURSE TO THE VIRGIN

When with purpose foul  
The malignant Devil  
Breathes upon thy soul  
Pestilential evil:

And thy spirit fair  
Clouds of horror darken,  
To thy tenderest prayer  
Bid the Virgin hearken.



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On thy blushing cheek  
Let the tear-drop glisten;  
Say: "O Mother meek,  
To thy client listen!"

Let the suppliant sigh  
Swell to deeper wailing:  
"Mother sweet, I fly  
To thy love unfailing:

"Heir am I of bliss  
And of glory deathless;  
Oh, remembering this,  
Let me not prove faithless:

"Let me never yield  
To the shameless Devil;  
Mary, be my shield  
'Gainst the darts of evil!"

Time moves on. The Tertiary Pope, the loved and hated but always the saintly Pius IX, is gathered to God after thirty-two years as Chief Shepherd; Cardinal Pecci is elected by forty-four votes out of sixty-one. From 20 February, 1878, to 20 July, 1903, he in turn was to have a long and glorious reign, twenty-five years and five months.

That fruitful pontificate, so crowded with good works that the mere listing would fill pages, is admirably sketched in miniature in Professor Umberto Benigni's monograph in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (ix, 169-173). Suffice it here to mention the Pope's diplomatic tact through which the

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Franco-Russian alliance was brought about; the Kulturkampf of Bismarck was broken and a *modus vivendi* effected between Church and State in Germany; concordats with Portugal, Montenegro and Colombia; establishment of diplomatic relations with Russia; friendly rapport with the Sultan of Turkey, the Shah of Persia, the Emperors of Japan and China, and the Negus of Abyssinia; negotiations with the United States concerning friars' lands in the Philippines.

In matters of education and scholarship, he opened the Vatican Archives to historical scholars, and established a consulting library; he erected the Vatican Observatory; he appointed a Biblical Commission, and the publishing of his "Providentissimus Deus" (1893) won the admiration even of Protestants; his Encyclical "Æterni Patris" (1880) recommended the study of Scholastic philosophy. At Anagni he founded a college for the dioceses of the Romagna, at Mossul a seminary for the Chaldeans, while in Rome he founded, or established, no less than seven seminaries and national colleges: the Armenian, Bohemian, Spanish, Beda, Ruthenian, Portuguese and, finally, the Leonine Pontifical.<sup>5</sup>

The Bulls, Encyclicals, Briefs and Letters Apostolic of Leo XIII are models of erudition and classicism.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the best known today, particularly since Pope Pius XI brings its convincing logic to date in his own companion encyclical, is the celebrated "Rerum Novarum" of 1891, on the Chris-

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tian principles bearing on the relations between Capital and Labor. Important, too, especially from our Franciscan point of view, was his early encyclical (1878) on the equality of all men. The document by which his name is best, though hardly affectionately, known to High church Anglicans, is the Brief "Apostolicæ Curæ" of 1896, in which, after the whole question of the validity of Anglican orders had been, at the request of Anglicans, thoroughly examined by unbiased scholars, historians and liturgical experts, the Pope as Infallible Teacher definitely declared *ex cathedra* against their validity.<sup>7</sup> The following year in a memorable encyclical, "Apostolicæ Sedes," he appealed to all schismatics of the East to return to the center of unity, and to Anglicans and other non-Catholics to abandon heresies and isolation. The Beda College, by the way, mentioned above, erected under the invocation of the English St. Bede the Venerable, was actually founded by Pius IX, but by his successor was re-established along permanent lines, in 1898; this is a seminary intended chiefly for convert ministers of middle age aspiring to the priesthood, and as such has proved a boon to ex-Anglicans.<sup>8</sup>

During the pontificate of Leo XIII, two hundred forty-eight episcopal or archiepiscopal sees were created and forty-eight vicariates or prefectures Apostolic. Religious orders increased in numbers and development, reforms were made, and sectioned orders reunited: Benedictines were given an abbot-

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primate, Cistercian unity was brought about, and my readers will be particularly interested to recall, if they had forgotten, that it was during Pope Leo's reign and under his guidance that in 1883 the Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis was wisely modified and adapted to conditions of today,<sup>9</sup>—the preceding year the Holy Father had recommended the Third Order to the faithful everywhere. His slogan was: "My plan of social reform is the Third Order of St. Francis."

And this great impulse given to the Order by its chief member was a main cause of its subsequent flourishing condition: today, it is estimated, we have altogether, scattered throughout the world and belonging to every class of society but united in one ideal, a grand total of three millions of Tertiaries!<sup>10</sup>

But behind this effect was a cause even more important, also the work of Leo XIII. I refer to his marvelous drawing together of the several families which, without severing themselves from the parent stem, had gradually grown apart from though within the fold of the friars called Observants. These were the Alcantarins or Discalced, the Recollects, the Reformed. By his Bull "Felicitate Quadam" of 1897, Pope Leo XIII united these branches to form the present Order of Friars Minor; for a while the words "of the Leonine Union" were added to the title. Thus today, the First Order is represented only by the Friars Minor, the Capuchins, the Conventuals.

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I say "only," but all of us hope and pray for the manifestation of God's will which would bridge these remaining divisions. In one of his *Franciscan Essays*, Father Dominic (Devas), O.F.M., has a heartbreakingly appealing footnote, reminding us that "Divisions must always be crippling—are, by all, acknowledged as such—and the Order remains divided. Divided by what? By sentimental attachment to splendid traditions, the cherished memory of great names and fine achievements, and—now in this twentieth century—indeed by nothing more. Union would more than double the efficacy of our apostolate. We revere the same Founder, profess the same Rule, work along the same channels, and yet are divided. The recent colossal fusion of the railway systems in England and Scotland, blotting out honored names and proud memories, side-tracking careers full of promise and merging single endeavors into a common front of progress, show us how the world, in time of crisis, can rise to an occasion and unite for the common good. The moral is obvious."<sup>11</sup>

But, to return to our theme, it has been said that, ordinarily, a poet's creative powers are at their height when he is between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. Before that the power seethes in immature crying, after that it sloughs off in weariness. Leo XIII was in no sense ordinary. As poet his star found its zenith in the evening of his long life. The poems of his later years are glorious; I regret I have not

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space for "The Opening Century," for "Praised Be Christ, Who Loves the Franks!" for "Our Lady's Rosary," for the "Epistle to Fabricius Rufus." I can give but two.

When in 1893 the Holy See established a special feast (Third Sunday after Epiphany) in honor of the Holy Family, its three hymns in the Breviary Office were contributed by the Pope. This is his hymn for Matins:—

A thousand lights their glory shed  
On shrines and altars garlanded;  
While swinging censers dusk the air  
With perfumed prayer.

And shall we sing the ancestry  
Of Jesus, Son of God most High?  
Or the heroic names retrace  
Of David's race?

Sweeter is lowly Nazareth,  
Where Jesus drew His childish breath—  
Sweeter the singing that endears  
His hidden years!

An Angel leads the pilgrim band  
From Egypt to their native land,  
Where Jesus clings to Joseph's arm,  
Secure from harm.

"And the Child grew in wisdom's ken  
And years and grace with God and men";  
And in His father's humble art  
Took share and part.

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"With toil," saith He, "my limbs are wet,  
Prefiguring the Bloody Sweat":  
Ah! how He bears our chastisement  
With sweet content!

At Joseph's bench, at Jesus' side,  
The Mother sits, the Virgin-bride;  
Happy, if she may cheer their hearts  
With loving arts.

O Blessed Three! who felt the sting  
Of want and toil and suffering,  
Pity the needy and obscure  
Lot of the poor:

Banish the "pride of life" from all  
Whom ampler wealth and joys befall;  
Be every heart with love repaid  
That seeks your aid!

A few years before he was called to his eternal  
reward, the aged Pontiff, with heart of a boy poet  
and soul of an ageless saint, wrote this little swan  
song:—

### DEO ET VIRGINI: INSTANTE MORTE

The western sun draws near his cloudy bed,  
Leo, and gradual darkness veils thy head:

The sluggish life-blood in thy withered veins  
More slowly runs its course—what then remains?

Lo! Death is brandishing his fatal dart,  
And the grave yearns to shroud thy mortal part:

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But from its prison freed, the soul expands  
Exulting pinions to the enfranchised lands.

My weary race is run—I touch the goal:  
Hear, Lord, the feeble pantings of my soul;

If it be worthy, Lord, Thy pitying breast,  
Welcome it unto everlasting rest!

May I behold thee, Queen of earth and sky,  
Whose love enchained the demons lurking nigh

The path to heaven; and freely shall I own  
'Twas thy sweet care that gained my blissful crown!

<sup>1</sup> "St. Malachy's Prophecy," in Latin and English, is reprinted in the 1932 *Almanac* edition of *The Franciscan* (Paterson, N. J.).

<sup>2</sup> *The Third Order of St. Francis: A Historical Essay*, by Fr. Fredegand Callaey, O.M.Cap., p. 53; trans. from Italian by Fr. John M. Lenhart, O.M.Cap. (Pittsburgh: St. Augustine Monastery, 1926).

<sup>3</sup> *Poems, Charades, Inscriptions of Pope Leo XIII*. Including the Revised Compositions of His Early Life in Chronological Order, with English Translation and Notes, by H. T. Henry, Overbrook Seminary. (Philadelphia and New York: The Dolphin Press, 1902.) Out of print and difficult to obtain, but well worth the effort.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard O'Reilly: *Life of Pope Leo XIII*, p. 55 (New York, 1887).

<sup>5</sup> See *Official Catholic Directory*, complete edition, 1932, p. 6 (New York: P. J. Kenedy).

<sup>6</sup> See *The Great Encyclicals of Leo XIII*, ed. by Fr. Wynne (New York, 1902).

<sup>7</sup> On this point see Estcourt's *Question of Anglican Orders Discussed*, Sydney Smith's *Reasons for Rejecting Anglican Orders*, and Canon Moyes' *Aspects of Anglican Orders*.

So loath were certain Anglicans humbly to accept this decision, that they argued against the Brief's infallibility by reason of absence of an anathema or maranatha concluding clause, and therefore believed it patient of eventual reversal or at least of a prevision and reconsideration. Some, knowing only too well its finality, and discouraged at the prospect and at last uncertain about their status, contrived by one means or another to receive their orders anew, or



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to have theirs validated through addition of a right intention and matter and bestowal of unquestioned historical succession, from the hands of some persuaded bishop of one of the sixteen autocephalus Eastern Orthodox bodies, or perhaps from the "Old Catholic" remnant, or even from the "Western Orthodox Church" of the notorious and unhappy "Archbishop" Arnold Mathew (who lived to reject his apostasy and who died a penitent, reconciled to Holy Church).

Even supposing Pope Leo XIII had given the verdict they had sought (though this is unthinkable), it would not have altered the fact that in that case those orders would nevertheless have remained irregular and their bearers in schism; even though several priests, until the Pope gave his judgment, upheld the orders, this private recognition could in no wise change the fact of their being null and void *ab initio*; even though the entire Eastern Orthodox body were officially to recognize the orders, this recognition would not make them valid without consent of the Holy See, and if it could, those orders would still be irregular because received from a schismatic and heretical hierarchy and not through the regular channel for transmission of orders; even though every Anglican clergyman were, with the consent of his entire communion, openly and deliberately to receive a new line and a valid one by a grant of orders from a Russian or Greek or Georgian or Bulgarian Orthodox episcopacy, even then he would not be a Catholic priest.

To possess valid orders is only one of the essentials for priesthood. What does it avail a man to contrive, somehow or other, to achieve an irregular though valid priesthood, when he can never under his present status exercise that priesthood? When he did not and could not receive sacerdotal or episcopal faculties, nor sacerdotal or episcopal jurisdiction? When, as long as he remain in a communion alien to, even inimical to, the centre of unity, even if he have them he may never exercise those priestly faculties of sacrifice and of absolution, and when he must remain without jurisdiction, parochial or diocesan? Even if it were allowed he possessed valid (though irregular) orders, even if faculties automatically accompanied those orders, even if this entailed a canonical jurisdiction, still he would have to face the fact that his Anglican communion, if thus adjudged to be not a modern Protestant sect, would nonetheless be in schism because wholly separated from the centre of unity. Nothing could rectify this condition but his withdrawal from that schism and his reconciliation with the Holy See. Since his communion *has* been adjudged, by the unerring voice of Christ's Vicar, to be without valid orders and therefore not even a schismatic body but only a non-Catholic and non-sacrificial sect, that sect's return to the Church must necessarily be a matter of individual conversion to the Faith, not, as in the case of Eastern schismatic bodies forswearing their schism, a corporate reunion.

But, furthermore, the mere recognition of orders does *not* entail

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recognition of jurisdiction,—hence canonical erection by the Holy See of Latin or Uniate dioceses in the same see cities where Eastern schismatics have thrones. Had Anglican orders been recognized, the like situation would have held: the Archbishop of Westminster would continue in his see, because he had received Papal jurisdiction, and the other had not, to be the real Bishop of London and likewise Metropolitan of England.

Your Anglican clergyman, to return to our set of arguments, even if he contrived (never mind how) secretly to receive valid orders from a schismatic prelate or, perish the thought, from a disgraceful traitor of the Latin Rite or Uniate, he would be, as said above, possessed of orders but would still be without jurisdiction, faculties or celebret, and, moreover and finally, in the very fact of his schismatic status if for no other reason would be guilty of heresy. To maintain the lawfulness or rightness of a schismatic position is heretical, entirely aside from the many heresies held by Anglicans in varying degrees. The holding of even one heresy is the shutting out of something of the Catholic Faith. Anglicans should bear this in mind when they gleefully narrate some courtesy received from Oriental Orthodoxy, or even an unofficial recognition of their orders. Eastern so-called Orthodoxy is heretical as well as schismatic, among its heresies being rejection of the dogma of Papal Infallibility and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. What satisfaction could it be to be recognized by a body which is itself both schismatic and heretical?

Possessing, therefore, neither faculties nor jurisdiction, accepting only so much of Catholic truth as his finite mind and his individual private interpretation will accept, teaching the heresy of separation from the Holy See, and himself separated and disobedient, at the worst your Anglican clergyman can be but a non-Catholic lay person, while at the most—and this only granting certain incredible suppositions or improbable secret manœuvres—he must be adjudged in schism, "shivering in insular isolation."

<sup>8</sup> See "The Beda," an interesting article by Maurice F. Bell, in the February, 1932, issue of *The Catholic World*.

<sup>9</sup> See Fr. Fredegand, *opus cit.*; see also *Franciscan Tertiaries*, by Fr. William, O.S.F.C. (Benziger, 1913); *The Seraphic Highway*, by Fr. Fulgence Meyer, O.F.M. (St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, 1925).

<sup>10</sup> Fr. Fredegand, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Page 53, essay "The Franciscan Order and Its Branches."

## XVII.

### *"The Mirror of Perfection"*

NOW we come to the end of our journey—and to its beginning; to the apocalypse of our scripture—and to its genesis; to the goal of our pilgrimage—and to its incentive; to the last of our poet-series—and to inalienably the first. He is the first of Franciscan poets, not only by virtue of priority in point of time, but first because his poetry is the most truly Franciscan, being the mirror of himself, and himself the Mirror of Perfection. He is both first and last among Franciscan poets, alpha and omega of the Little Poor Brothers, because any successor, any subsequent friar-poet, poet-nun, or Tertiary poet must be, even the most renowned among them, Franciscan poets only insofar as they are of his Seraphic family and capture the ineffable magic of his singing soul.

And so at the last we come to him (though indeed he has been in spirit with us always) ; we come with love and perfect joy, in our tatter-tunics, in

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our sandals, in our regal robes or in our chasubles, in our bridal veils or in our what-may-be, brothers and sisters, kings and mendicants, abbesses and externs, clerics and novices, saints and sinners, singers and scriveners, the learned and the unlettered, we come to the great lover; we come with his own greeting, hailing one another with his "*Dominus det tibi pacem*" and giving the kiss of pax; we come because love drew us and poetry sang the words of love: we come to *the* Franciscan poet, to the dreamer behind the dream-come-true: we come to our little father in God: we come to Saint Francis of Assisi.

This is not a biographical summary of the Umbrian merchant's gay troubadour son,—soldier, penitent, tender of lepers, strengthener of churches, mendicant, social reformer, lover of poverty, minister-general of the Friars Minor, missionary, stigmatist, saint, occupant of the vacant throne of Satan. We all know in each detail the life of this best loved saint in the calendar; anything I might write of his story would be only familiar repetition, lesser echoing of documented history.

For seven centuries his biographers have plied their loving trade; there seldom is, today, a change of the moon without some new work appearing on this endlessly fascinating theme. You can read his story, in English, from original sources of his first disciples and immediate followers—among other translations, the life by St. Bonaventure, the *Specu-*

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*lum Perfectionis*, begun probably by Brother Leo, the *Sacrum commercium*, the *Fioretti*, *Franciscan Days*. You can study him in his own writings collated by our Father Paschal (now titular Archbishop and Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland). You can see him in the drama of his life, in the *Little Plays of St. Francis*, by Laurence Housman; *The Little Poor Man*, by Harry Lee; *The Marriage of St. Francis*, by Henri Ghéon (translation by Fr. Martindale, S.J.). You can study him as pre-eminently the emulator of holy poverty and of social reform, as exemplar of Catholic social action, in books and brochures by Fr. Leo Dubois, S.M., Fr. J. Elliot Ross, C.S.P., Fr. Thomas, O.S.F.C., Stanley James; his ideals are set forth by Fr. Hilarion, O.M. Cap., his romanticism by Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C. Or you can reread his story as told today, for children, by Michael Williams and by Sister M. Eleonore, C.S.C.; for their seniors by G. K. Chesterton, by Salvatorelli, by Bounard, by Jørgensen, by M. F. Egan, by Fr. Cuthbert, by Fr. Candide Chalippe, O.F.M., by Fr. Léopold de Chérancé, by E. Salusbury, by Fr. Paschal, O.F.M., by Giovanni Papini, by a host of others,<sup>1</sup> alight with some reflected measure of the consuming ardor that burned in the breast of Francis Bernardone.

If you are still insatiate *after* reading these listed biographies, trustworthy because the fruit both of erudition and of faith, several among the hundreds

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penned without complete faith might be not unprofitably consulted. Vida D. Scudder's *The Franciscan Adventure*, the ten-author compilation called *St. Francis of Assisi: Essays in Commemoration*, 1226-1926, these and certain few others by non-Catholics are worth consideration. It must always be borne in mind, however, that nearly all present-day Protestant enthusiasts of St. Francis reflect in some measure the supernatural-sheering Paul Sabatier, who, despite his learning and several real contributions to Franciscan study, is a very unsafe guide, and his *Vie de St. François* is on the Index of forbidden books. As Papini warns us: "If anything in the world could obscure the sanctity of a saint, I should be greatly concerned these days by the popular, or rather, the fashionable, position acquired by the son of Peter Bernardone among those who are least capable of understanding him or imitating him. . . . Those who deny Christ's existence are willing to concede the historicity and even, by a stretch, the perfection of Francis. Almost alone out of all Catholic heroes, the Reformers have taken him under the benign protection of their rationalism. . . . He is the saint who can be unobtrusively deformed to serve the purposes of those heretical dilettantes, who though they flutter around the flowers of the Faith pretending to be bees, in reality are wasps who will never make honey."<sup>2</sup>

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Not a biographical sketch, here I but touch, and with brevity, upon one facet in the jewel of Umbria, our little father St. Francis as poet. Though, indeed, his whole life in itself was a poem.

He must not be overlooked as dramatist; for in everything he did there was unrehearsed theatre:—do not misunderstand me, for I use the term in its most exalted sense. Never, even by those who have small patience with his story, has our blessed Founder been called theatrical. I mean, rather, that there was a heaven-nursery drama, the acts of the saints, in all his movements, all his words, his very appearance. What more holily dramatic than that first Christmas crèche at Greccio, under the purple sky and the singing stars? What more sublimely dramatic than the word-begging scene on Alvernia, in the awe-full moment of the sacred Stigmata?

In his contribution to lingual culture, too, he helped much. From his good mother, Pica, he learned songs in French and Provençal. He improvised others, singing blithely his extemporaneous chansons with Gallic lightness, with Italian sweetness, and with a new beauty cast over the classicism that is Latin. Sometimes, as Celano tells us in the *Vita Secunda*, the sweet melody of the spirit within Francis was wont to break forth into utterance in French, and the vein of the divine whisper which his ear perceived in secret would burst forth

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into a song of joy. Sometimes, as his companions saw with their eyes, he would pick up a stick from the ground and putting it over his left arm would draw across it another stick like a bow which he held in his right hand, as though playing on a viol or other instrument, and going through the proper motions, he would sing about Our Lord. Often this ecstasy of joy would end in tears, and the song of gladness would dissolve into compassion for the Passion of Christ; and then this holy man would utter groanings and, forgetting the things he was holding in his hands, would be uplifted towards heaven. And so we come to him as poet indeed.

In all the undisputed and in all the probable writings of St. Francis, there is that passion and beauty and word magic we call poetry. Poetry fairly shines in these fragments, in his *Rules*, in his *Admonitiones*, in his *Hermit-Rules*, in his *Testament*, in *Ultima Voluntas* (to the Clares) in the *Prayer for Lady Poverty* and in other prayers, in the plea *On Reverence for the Lord's Body*, in his letters, in his *Blessing of Brother Leo*.

When we come to his actual poems, those exquisite *laudi* he sang even as he composed their simple lines, usually in the vernacular, and some of which happily were copied out by his companions and a few of these preserved, one will always be treasured and forever associated with him as the very essence of his character, and this of course



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is that first genuine religious poem in the Italian language, the so-called "Canticle of the Sun," the *Laudes Creaturarum*, of which I treated in the paper on Brother Pacifico. Therein we have his blithesomeness, his love of nature and his habit of courtesy extended even to "my Sister Death, our death of the body." Renan called this canticle "the loveliest piece of religious poetry since the time of the Evangelists"; Gabriel Faure, agreeing, adds that it is "the first greeting of the Italian Renaissance to the Nature she had found again."<sup>3</sup> I pause here to remind readers once more that it is absolutely not even remotely tinged with Pantheism, as some non-Catholics seem to conclude: it is not a hymn *to* the creatures, it is an offering *of* all creatures' praises *to God*. Of less well-known poems, unquestionably the creation of St. Francis, we have, gathered among his writings, the *Laudes Domini*, the *Laudes de Virtutibus*, the *Laudes Dei*; while among poems attributed to him but their authorship questioned, we have *In Foco Amor Mi Mise* and *Amor di Caritade*. Of these last two I shall have something to say presently.

Opening the *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, we come across this passage: "'Perchance wast thou thinking of taking a wife?' . . . 'Truly have ye spoken, for that I thought of taking unto me a bride nobler and richer and fairer than ever ye have seen.' And they mocked at him."<sup>4</sup> This, comments Ozanam, "was the description he gave of

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his ideal of all perfection, the type of all moral beauty, namely Poverty. He loved to personify this virtue according to the symbolic genius of his time; he imagined her as a heavenly damsel whom he called in turn the lady of his thoughts, his betrothed, his spouse. He bestowed on her all the power which the troubadours attributed to the noble ladies celebrated in their poems—the power of wresting from the souls captivated by her all worldly thoughts and inclinations, of elevating such souls to the society of the angels. But while with the troubadours these platonic loves were merely witticisms, the invisible beauty which had ravished St. Francis wrung from him the most impassioned cries. Open any of the medieval poets and you will find no song more bold, no words more impassioned, than this prayer of the penitent of Assisi.”<sup>5</sup>

The *Prayer of St. Francis for Lady Poverty*, in itself a great poem of magnificent imagery, as well as a marvelous prayer, if we allow for exuberance of the Latin temperament, is from the so-called *Operi Sancti Francisci*:—

“O my most sweet Lord Jesus Christ, have pity on me and on my Lady Poverty, for I burn with love of her, and without her I cannot rest. O my Lord, Who didst cause me to be enamored of her, Thou knowest that she is sitting in sadness, rejected by all; ‘the mistress of nations is become as a widow,’ vile and contemptible; the queen of all virtues, seated on a dunghill, complains that all her friends have despised her, and are become her

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enemies; they have proved themselves deceivers, and not spouses.

"Behold, O Lord Jesus! how truly Poverty is the queen of all the virtues; for, leaving the abode of Angels, Thou didst come down to earth that Thou mightest espouse her to Thyself with constant love, and produce from her, in her, and by her, the children of all perfection. . . .

"At Thy birth she received Thee in a manger and a stable; and during Thy life she so stripped Thee of all things that she would not even allow Thee a stone whereon to rest Thy head. As a most faithful consort she accompanied Thee when Thou didst go forth to fight for our redemption; and in the conflict of Thy Passion she alone stood by as Thy armor-bearer; when Thy disciples fled, and denied Thy Name, she did not leave Thee, but, with the whole band of her princes, she fearlessly adhered to Thee.

"On account of the height of Thy Cross, even Thy Mother (who devotedly loved Thee, and shared so deeply in the bitterness of Thy Passion) could not reach Thee; but Thy Lady Poverty, with companion Want, embraced Thee more closely than ever, and was more firmly united to Thee in Thy sufferings. Therefore she would not allow Thy Cross to be smoothed or in any way polished: the very nails were (as it is believed) too few in number, not sharpened nor ground; but she provided only three—blunt, thick and rough—in order to increase Thy torments.

"And when Thou wast consumed with thirst, she, Thy faithful spouse, was there, and did not allow Thee to have even a drop of water; but by means of the impious executioners she prepared for Thee a draught so bitter that Thou couldst only taste, not drink it. In the strong embrace of this Thy spouse, Thou didst breathe forth Thy Soul.

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"Nor did she forsake Thee at Thy burial, but she took care that Thou shouldst have neither sepulchre, nor ointments, nor winding-clothes, except what were lent Thee by others.

"This Thy holy spouse was not absent from Thy Resurrection, for rising gloriously in her embrace Thou didst leave in the Sepulchre all these borrowed things.

"Thou didst bear her with Thee to heaven, leaving all that is in the world. And now Thou hast given to Thy Lady Poverty the seal of Thy kingdom, that she may sign the elect who walk in the way of perfection.

"Oh! who would not love the Lady Poverty above all! I beseech Thee to grant me this much-desired treasure. O my most poor Jesus, I ask this favor for myself and my children for ever, that for love of Thee they may never possess anything of their own, that they may use the goods of others sparingly, and that they may suffer Poverty as long as they live in this miserable world. Amen."

Here indeed is poetry, since wherever you feel the warmth of actual experience and of imagination in any writing, wherever it contain ecstasy so enkindled that it engender ecstasy, there is poetry, whether it be in a measured rhythm or metre, the traditional form of verse, or in the non-metrical or discontinuous rhythms of prose, or in antithetical prose or cadence, as of the Sacred Scripture, which is a cross between them. I should indeed call the *Prayer for Lady Poverty* a very great poem.

The allegory of the mystic marriage of St. Francis with the Lady Poverty is mentioned by all

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the early Franciscan writers, as well as being portrayed by the early Tertiary painters, Giotto and Pietro di Sano. St. Bonaventure's account is the best known, but one of the most interesting of the early records is the *Sacrum Commercium Domina Paupertatis cum Sancto Patre Francisco*, attributed by some to Bl. John of Parma, seventh Minister-General in succession to St. Francis, by others to John Parenti, by still others to Friar John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury and author of *Philomela*. An admirable translation is that of Mr. Montgomery Carmichael.<sup>6</sup> Bl. Jacopone da Todi made verse on the same theme, and Dante refers to it in *Paradiso*, Canto xi, 64-75, in a few beautiful lines.

We come to two poems, quoted by St. Bernardine of Siena<sup>7</sup> and by him accredited to St. Francis, though Pater Ireneo Affo, according to Jörgensen, ascribes both poems, *In Foco Amor Mi Mise* and the *Amor di Caridade*, to Jacopone; but let us remember St. Bernardine lived in the century immediately after that which gave birth to the Poverello, was enrolled from early youth in the Seraphic family and may be regarded as a faithful interpreter of the legends. Moreover, beneath the surface construction and refinement, perhaps added by Bro. Pacifico or another, is to be found all the strength of the genius of St. Francis, his lingual precision, and the quality of ecstasy peculiar to the Stigmatist, but recently come from Alvernia. The

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poem *In Foco Amor Mi Mise* is thus rendered in English:

"Love has thrust me in the furnace, Love has thrust me in the furnace; he has plunged me in the furnace of love.

"My new spouse, the beloved Lamb, has wed me with the nuptial ring; then, having cast me into prison, he pierced me with his dart, and has broken my heart.

"He has broken my heart and I am cast to the ground. Those arrows discharged from the crossbow of Love have wounded and inflamed me.

"Instead of granting me peace, he has made war upon me; I die of Love's sweet pain.

"I die of yearning. Be not astonished. These wounds are inflicted by the sword of Love. Behold the blade is long and wide as an hundred braces; it has pierced me through.

"Then the darts rained upon me so thickly, that I was o'ershadowed with the agony. Then I raised my shield, but the shafts followed so closely upon each other that it afforded me no protection; they have broken my body, so strong was the arm that drew them.

"He aimed them so surely that I despaired of parrying them, and I cried with all my strength that I might escape into the arms of death; 'Thou dost violate the rules of the joust.' But he designed an instrument of war which overwhelmed me with fresh assaults.

"The darts which he shot were of stone covered with lead, each one of which weighed fully a thousand pounds; he rained them thick as hail so that I was not able to count them. No one of them missed the mark.

"He never failed to pierce me, so truly could he aim. I was prostrate on the earth, and had no power to support

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my limbs. My body was broken and without feeling, like that of a dead man.

"Killed, not by physical death, but by excess of joy. Then, regaining power over my body, my strength was renewed so that I could follow the guides who were leading me to the court of heaven.

"After I had revived, straightway I armed myself, and made war on Christ; I rode into His territory and, meeting Him, I closed with Him and took a speedy vengeance upon Him.

"When I was avenged, I made a truce with Him: for from the outset Christ had loved me with an ardent love. Now is my heart enabled to seek consolation in Christ.

"Love has cast me into the furnace, Love has thrust me into the furnace; he has plunged me into the furnace of love."

The other poem quoted by St. Bernardine of Siena and by him ascribed to St. Francis, *Amor di Caritade*, in the untranslated if not original version comprises three hundred sixty-two lines, divided into stanzas of ten brief lines each, with rhymes carefully arranged. Later writers, further removed from St. Francis than was St. Bernardine and hence, one would think, less capable of assertion on the point, claimed Bl. Jacopone da Todi as author. The poem, as I admitted of the other, may indeed not be as we now have it the sole creation of St. Francis, for the precision and simplicity which stamp his works are lacking. Yet as the tradition happily persists, it may be that Jacopone but paraphrased, with his natural versatility and subtlety, some old song of the holy Founder, just as, as

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Ozanam observes, the followers of a musician reproduce in a series of variations the motif given by the master. We can confirm this theory by considering the following dialogue between Christ and His perfect imitator, the Mirror of His Perfection, St. Francis, lines in which is the characteristic extract:

*The Soul or Francis:*

" 'Would that my senses might never be restored, if Love makes me to act as one possessed!

" 'Weak is the heart of him who would defend himself, who would escape from such a Love! . . .

" 'For heaven and earth cry out to me unceasingly, and all beings to whom I owe love exhort me: Love, love, who has made us to lure thee to him. . . . '

*Christ:*

" 'Set love in order, if thou lovest Me. Virtue can not exist in disorder, and all created things have I fashioned with number and measure, all are ordered to their final end. . . .

" 'Can it be then, O Christian Soul, that thou hast become demented through excess of zeal? Thou hast passed the bounds of order, and fervor has known no curb.'

*The Soul or Francis:*

" 'O Christ! Thou hast despoiled me of my heart, and Thou biddest me to set in order my soul! . . . Thou hast also yielded Thyself to Love. Thou hast descended from heaven to earth through the wiles of love; Thou hast even abased Thyself to pass through the world as a man despised. Thou hast desired neither shelter nor possession, but poverty alone for our enrichment.



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" 'In life even as in death, 'Thou hast shown that a boundless Love has consumed Thy heart.

" 'Often hast paced the earth like a drunken man; Love has led Thee as his slave.

" 'In all things hast Thou been ruled by Love, nor ever hast Thou thought upon Thyself. . . .

" 'And I know well that when Thou didst not speak, nor justify Thyself in the presence of Pilate, Thou wast moved by the desire to win our salvation on the cross erected by Love.' "

A beautiful character, says the casual reader, yes, and surely a saint, but impractical like all poets! On the contrary, even more marvelous than his character was his gift of leadership. History pulses with the names of Peter the Hermit and of St. Jeanne d'Arc, of Napoleon and of Bismarck, of Washington, of Lincoln, of Franklin, nation-makers, great personalities. None of them moved the soul of the world as did this "impractical" little man in the patched tunic. His leadership is the most astounding fact in human history. Only One was greater, and that One is Divine. St. Francis is His perfect imitator, as Brother Leo said, His Mirror of Perfection. That leadership has never waned. Five of his friar-sons have sat on the Chair of Peter, eleven other Popes were of his Third Order; more than a hundred Cardinals and more than three thousand Bishops and Archbishops have worn his habit; upward of five hundred of his children have been canonized. Today he has thirty-five thousand friars of the First Order, eleven thou-

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sand four hundred thirty cloistered nuns of the Second Order, thirty-seven thousand Tertiaries Regular, men and women, and more than three millions of Tertiaries Secular. He is still, this sweet impractical poet, this bird-talker, the greatest human leader of religious thought and striving in the whole world.

One would like to quote forever every recorded word uttered by the Poverello, for every word of his was poetry, every poem was inspired of God. Let me give but one more passage, one prose-poem, one that shows forth the full measure of his heaven-touched genius, our closing note so alien to the materialistic spirit about us in these days when, as never before, we need the ideals and the romanticism of St. Francis, yes, but with them his grasp of the realities, the eternal verities, the truths gleaned from God the Holy Spirit for the unspiritual world. This prose-poem is the celebrated description of *Perfect Joy*, as given in the fifth of the Poverello's *Admonitiones* and developed in the *Fioretti*:

"One day in winter, as St. Francis was going with Brother Leo from Perugia to St. Mary of the Angels, and was suffering greatly from the cold, he called to Brother Leo, who went ahead, and spoke thus to him: 'Brother Leo, if it were to please God that the Friars Minor should give, in all lands, a great example of holiness and edification, mark it well and write it down, that this would not be perfect joy.'

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"A little farther on, St. Francis called to him a second time and said: 'O Brother Leo, if the Friars Minor were to make the lame to walk, if they should make straight the crooked, chase away demons, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and, what is even a far greater work, if they should raise the dead after four days, mark thou and write, that this would not be perfect joy.'

"And he went on a little, and cried out again: 'O Brother Leo, if the Friars Minor knew all tongues; if they were versed in all science; if they could expound all Scripture; if they had the gift of prophecy, and could reveal, not only all future things, but likewise the secrets of all consciences and all souls, even so mark thou, that this would not be perfect joy.'

"And going on a few steps farther, he cried out again with a loud voice: 'O Brother Leo, thou God's little lamb, even if the Friars Minor could speak with the tongues of angels; if they could explain the course of the stars; if they knew the powers of all herbs; if all the treasures of the earth were revealed to them; if they were acquainted with various qualities of all the birds, of all the fishes, of every animal, of men, of trees, of stones, of roots, and of waters, mark thou this still, that in this would not be perfect joy.'

"Shortly thereafter, he cried out again: 'O Brother Leo, if the Friars Minor had the gift of preaching so that all the faithless would be converted to the Faith of Christ, write that this would not be perfect joy.'

"Now when this manner of discourse had lasted for the space of two miles, at last Brother Leo wondered much within himself, and questioning the saint, he said: 'Father, I pray thee for God's sake teach me wherein is perfect joy.'

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"And St. Francis answered him, and said: 'If, when we shall arrive at Portiuncula, all drenched with rain and trembling with cold, and dirty with the mud of the road, and overcome with hunger; if, when we knock at the convent gate, the porter should come angrily and ask us who we are; if, after we have told him, "We are two of thy Brothers," he should answer angrily, "You do not speak the truth; you are but two impostors going about to deceive the world, and to take away the alms of the poor: begone, I say"; if then he refuse to open to us, if he leave us outside, exposed to snow and rain, suffering from cold and hunger till the nightfall—then, if we accept such injustice, such cruelty, such contempt with patience, without being ruffled and without murmuring, believing with humility and charity that the porter really knows us, and that it is God that maketh him to speak thus against us, then write down, O Brother Leo, that this is perfect joy!

"'And if we knock again, and the porter come out in anger to drive us away with oaths and blows, as if we were vile impostors, saying, "Begone, miserable robbers! go to the lepers, for here you shall neither eat nor sleep!"—and if we accept all this with patience, with joy, with charity, O Brother Leo, write that this is indeed perfect joy!

"'And if, driven by cold and hunger and the night, we knock again, calling to the porter and entreating him with many tears to open to us and give us shelter, for the love of God, and if he come out more angry than before, and says, "These are certainly shameless rascals, but now they shall get their deserts," and, taking a knotted stick, he seize us by our hoods, throw us on the ground, roll us in the snow, and beat and wound us with the knots in the stick—if we bear all these injuries with patience and joy, thinking of the sufferings

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of Our Blessed Lord, and of how much we ought to suffer for the sake of our love for Him, write, O Brother Leo, that here, finally, is perfect joy.

" 'Now hear the end of all this, Brother. Above all the graces and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ vouchsafes to His friends, is the conquering of oneself, and the willing acceptance of suffering out of love for Christ, as well injury, discomfort and contempt. For not in other gifts of God can we glory, seeing they proceed not from ourselves but from God, as said the Apostle: "What hast thou that thou hast not received from God? and if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" But in the cross of tribulation and affliction we can take the credit to ourselves, because, as the Apostle says again, "I will not glory save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.' "

Still clinging to them, these singers of perfect joy, our Franciscan Poets, let us go on, with them drawing nearer to the Beatific Vision while in the flesh and on earth we glory in no thing save only the Cross of Our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bibliography at end of this volume for an extensive list together with publishers' names and dates.

<sup>2</sup> Papini: *Laborers in the Vineyard*, trans. by Alice Curtayne, pp. 80 sqq. (N. Y.: Longmans, Green, 1930).

<sup>3</sup> *The Land of St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 99 (London and Boston: The Medici Society, 1924).

<sup>4</sup> *Legend of St. Francis*, by the Three Companions, iii, 7; cf. Thomas of Celano: *Vita Prima*, cap. iii, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Ozanam: *The Franciscan Poets in Italy of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. and annotated by A. E. Nellen and M. C. Craig, ch. ii, p. 60 (London: David Nutt, 1914).

<sup>6</sup> Published by Messrs. Burns, Oates, London, with a chapter on the Spiritual Significance of Evangelical Poverty by Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C.

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<sup>7</sup> *Opera*, t. iv, sermon 4; *Opera*, t. iv, sermon 16; cf. Bolland, t. ii, Oct., p. 1003.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the translations in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, introduction by Fr. Dominic, O.F.M., first Engl. trans. revised and amended by Dom Roger Hudleston, O.S.B. (Burns, Oates, 1926), pp. 29-33, and in Johannes Jørgensen's *St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. by T. O'Connor Sloane (Longmans, Green, 1928), pp. 119-121.

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If the reader will have patiently reached the end of this book and his interest in Franciscana will have been whetted, he will be rewarded by a reading of any of the following volumes. These titles, all of them selected from among the Franciscan works in the English language gathered in my own library, will not here include all those volumes referred to in the preceding studies of Franciscan poets, and will, on the other hand, embrace a number of books which were not mentioned in these articles because not concerned primarily with the poets of the Seraphic Family; it is rather my purpose here to list only those English titles from my library of Franciscana which will tend to increase the already interested reader's enthusiasm for the ideals of St. Francis. It is only fair, however, to mention that several of these books are now out of print and one or two others are not ordinarily accessible to the layman. It should also be borne in mind that a few, e.g. those by Scudder, Underhill, Housman, Whiting, possibly several others in this list, are the work of non-Catholics.

*The Rule and General Constitutions of the Friars Minor*, trans. into Engl. by a Priest of the Province of the Most Holy Name.

*The Book of Life, or A Brief Literal Exposition of the Holy Rule of the Seraphic Father St. Francis*, by P. Kilian (Kazenberger), O.F.M., re-edited & trans. by a Father of the Prov. of the Most Holy Name.

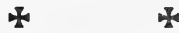
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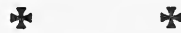
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*The Franciscans*, by Father James, O.S.F.C. (the "Many Mansions" Series). London: Sheed & Ward, 1930.

*Some Pages of Franciscan History*, by Fr. Paschal (Robinson), O.F.M. London: Catholic Truth Society.



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In addition to the bibliography from my library shelves, I recommend the following titles, if at all procurable today (I have been unable to obtain them):

*The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi* (De la Warr); *The Authentic Portraiture of St. Francis* (Westlake); *A Short Introduction to Franciscan Literature* (Fr. Paschal); *Collectanea Anglo-Minoritica; or A Collection of the Antiquities of the English Franciscans* (Parkinson); *The Friars and How They Came to England* (Fr. Cuthbert); *Franciscan Martyrs in England* (Mrs. Hope); *The Rise and Fall of the Franciscan Monasteries* (Meehan); *Franciscans in California* (Fr. Zephyrin); *Missions & Missionaries of California* (4 vols., Fr. Zephyrin); *The Holy Man of Santa Clara* (Fr. Zephyrin); *St. Clare* (Fr. Paschal).

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